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The Pirate Prince;

OR,

Pretty Nelly, the Queen of the Isle.

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AUTHOR OF "THE DARE-DEVIL," "THE CRETAN ROVER," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE OATH.

Two men stood upon a lofty cliff that overhung a sheltered cove indenting an island in the Caribbean sea.

Before them, beyond the little harborage, spread the blue waters for miles and miles, unbroken by a single sail, and gilded by the rays of the declining sun.

At their feet lay the basin, a few square acres in size and sheltered in the earthen arms of the island in such a way as to fully protect it from the storms without and afford a safe anchorage for the several vessels that rode upon its waters—one, a trim-built schooner, with sails spread

and crew on board, as though anxious to fly to sea.

A sloop of twenty tons, two cat-rig sail-boats and several skiffs made up the fleet in the harbor upon which the eyes of the two men rested when presented to the reader.

Behind them stretched away the land, rugged, wild-looking, and everywhere surrounded by the sea, that beat with ominous roar upon the island coast which arose from its depths, as if to check its wild career when lashed into fury by the storms that swept over it.

From the position where the two men stood, their eyes, when turned landward, could fall upon a lovely valley, nestling away behind the rocky barriers of the coast, and in which were visible a score or more of rude huts, built of ship timbers—the wreck of ill-fated vessels that had been hurled upon that inhospitable shore—inhabitable to all who did not know that within the island was a safe anchorage, invisible from the sea.

But the hamlet seemed deserted now, and the inmates were assembled upon the white beach of the basin, talking earnestly to the half-dozen occupants of a small cutter that seemed await-

ing the coming of some one, and that some one it was evident was one of the two men standing upon the cliff, for toward those two were the eyes of the crowd often turned.

But, unmindful of the impatient glances, the two men stood in silence, their eyes calmly surveying the scene of island, crowd of rudely-dressed seamen, harbor, with its several crafts, and the rolling sea beyond.

That the two stood in the relationship of kindred was evident, for they were strangely alike in both face and form—though one was stern-looking almost to savageness, and his face was weather-beaten by long exposure to a seaman's life.

The elder, a man of fifty, perhaps, possessed a bold, resolute face, marred by a look of evil that rested upon it, yet which did not hide the intellect that gleamed in the dark eyes or that was stamped on the massive forehead.

He was attired in white duck pants, top-boots and a blue woolen shirt, the broad collar of which was turned down over a black silk scarf, and in his hand he held a slouch hat, encircled by a gold cord, while around his waist was a belt to which hung a short sword, and in which



"I SWEAR IT, FATHER," ANSWERED RAFAEL, FIRMLY.

were stuck two pistols of the pattern used half a century ago.

His companion was perhaps twenty-two years of age, and though his face was bronzed by exposure it was not rugged, and the complexion would have made a woman envious.

His eyes were dark, restless, and every feature perfect and beaming with intelligence, while his mouth, though determined, was free from the cruel look resting upon that of his companion.

His dress, though something like the elder person's, was of finer material; the boots were of the best leather, and fitted him perfectly, the pants of white duck were spotless, and the blue woolen shirt was worked on the sleeves, collar and front with gold thread, while the necktie was of white silk and tied in a sailor's knot.

The hat, of soft white felt, was encircled by a gold cord, and fastened upon the side with a gold pin representing an anchor and cable.

Like his companion he too was armed, but with weapons of a lighter pattern and finer make, and a sash of gold bullion encircled his waist, giving him altogether the appearance of a jaunty, handsome young sailor.

As the sun crept nearer the horizon, the old seaman broke the silence that for some time had remained undisturbed, and his voice was deep, with a tone almost threatening.

"Now, Rafael, you understand me, I hope?"

"Yes, father, I understand that within a few moments I must put to sea, and run my head into the hangman's noose as a corsair," returned the young man, somewhat bitterly.

"Boy, from your earliest years you have been little better. Were you not brought up on a pirate deck?"

"Alas! yes."

"Have you not followed me upon an enemy's deck time and time again, and been so fierce in your battling that the men called you the devil's cub?"

"Meaning you for the devil, I suppose, father? True, I was all that; but then, when I became eighteen years of age, you sent me to the United States to college, and I mingled with men of honor; I found out how a pirate was detested; I learned to feel that there was a nobler life for me than sailing under the black flag."

"It is the flag that has protected you, boy, for years."

"True, because brave and strong arms upheld it; nevertheless, the three years I have passed among honorable men have proven to me that it is a flag accursed upon the sea and land."

"I was a fool to send you away from me, Rafael; but I did it for your good, and with the hope that my end might have been gained ere your return, and that then we could live together in peace and contentment."

"You were a splendid sailor, though a boy in years; none better ever stood on a deck; and I wished you to see something of the world, and receive an education; but you come back to me with notions of honor that I admire, yet cannot encourage, for our vow is unfulfilled; you remember that vow, do you not, Rafael?"

"Yes, I remember it, sir."

"You remember that you swore, with me, to hunt the seas over and run to cover your enemy and mine?"

"I remember."

"And would you break that vow?"

The youth remained silent an instant, and a troubled look rested upon his face—seeing which the other continued in an almost savage tone:

"Would you break that vow now—after you have come back to me, to your old comrades, and your old vessel to remind you of it; after I have brought you back and placed you in command of the schooner, which I risked so much to newly arm, and man with a crew of seventy-five as brave men as ever stood on a deck?"

"Would you break your vow, Rafael, and allow that man to escape our revenge?"

"No, father, I will keep my oath, and I meant not to break it; only it was hard, after living among men of honor, to become the leader of a band of buccaneers. It is hard, yet I will hunt our enemy upon every sea, and when we are avenged, I will then try and let the past fade in oblivion, and live among honorable men."

"You swear this again, Rafael?" and as the old man asked the question a gleam of savage delight flashed over his face.

"I swear it, father," answered the youth, firmly.

"Enough; you are still my brave and noble boy. Go now, for the sunset breeze is coming; go, and hunt down that man! Oh! would that I could accompany you, yet this cursed wound keeps me from mingling in strife now," and the old man placed his hand upon his side, as though suffering pain.

A moment's silence followed, and then the young man turned and grasped the hand of his companion, while he said sadly, yet firmly:

"Farewell, father! If no ill befall me I will return in three months—perhaps sooner, and I trust then the black flag will no longer shake its sable folds in my face, haunting me with

specters that I would were forever buried. Farewell, sir."

"Take care of yourself, Rafael," and the old man waved his hand as the youth sped swiftly down the steep hillside to the beach below, where, upon his arrival, he was greeted with a cheer by the half-hundred men assembled there.

Raising his hat in return, he sprang into the waiting cutter, and his lips parted with the order:

"Give way, men!"

The six oars fell simultaneously into the water, and the boat moved rapidly away toward the waiting schooner.

"Up with that anchor, lads. Now, helmsman, stand out to sea!" cried the young commander, as he bowed in answer to the cheer given him by his crew as he sprang on deck, and two minutes after the graceful vessel was dancing seaward over the waters, stirred by the evening breeze.

CHAPTER II.

THE BRIG AND THE BUCCANEER.

"Do you think there is no hope, Captain Rodney?"

The questioner was a young and exquisitely lovely girl of eighteen, who turned her large and wistful eyes upon the one she addressed, while her face alternately flushed and paled with hope and dread.

The man she addressed was past the meridian of life—a weather-beaten, honest old sailor, who had in his forty years' sea service risen from before the mast to the command of as pretty a craft as floated the waters—a trim-built, graceful brig, that, under a tremendous pressure of canvas, was cutting through the rough waters before a spanking breeze; while, dogging her wake, and just over a league away, came a large schooner, whose low hull, raking masts, and armed deck, gave rise to the suspicion that her deck was shadowed by the flag of the buccaneer.

With the morning sun the look-out at the mast-head of the brig had discovered the schooner two leagues away, and through the whole day the persistent pursuer had given chase, steadily, though slowly, overhauling the merchant craft, and causing uneasiness to all who knew how desperate a thing it was to be taken by one of those daring skimmers of the sea, whose deeds were known through every land and over all waters.

"Miss Markham, there is hope as long as there is life, and we may elude yonder fellow when night comes on—and—"

"And what, captain?" asked Mabel Markham, as Captain Rodney paused.

"And we may not, for the schooner steadily comes nearer in spite of the brig's speed. I tell you, Miss Markham, that craft has a light heel, and runs like a witch. I never saw a vessel that could crowd the Sunbeam as he does," and an anxious look crossed the old sailor's face.

"Can you not resist him?"

"He has ten guns, and a crew of fully sixty men; I have four howitzers, and not half the number in crew; but he shall not take me without a fight," and Captain Rodney spoke with firmness.

"And if he does capture the brig, captain?" asked the young girl.

"Then our voyage is ended," bluntly replied the seaman.

"He assuredly would not kill us?"

"Your life is safe, Miss Markham, and the hope of a large ransom may cause the buccaneer to carry you to your father; but, as for myself and crew, if we do not fall upon our deck, why we will doubtless have to walk the plank to our death, be sent down in the brig, or set adrift in an open boat to starve or drown. Those pirates are real devils, Miss Markham, and you see I paint the thing in its strongest colors."

Mabel Markham turned away, her face pale, and her eyes dimmed with tears as she again turned them upon the schooner, so swiftly coming on in pursuit.

But the tears blurred her vision, and she bowed her head upon the taffrail, and a shudder passed through her form, for, from bright hope at soon seeing her father, from whom she had been separated two years, she was cast down almost with despair.

Her father was an officer of the navy of the United States, and commanded a vessel then cruising in southern waters, and thither Mabel was going to join him after having finished her education in New York.

With no mother, and her father's home in his vessel, Mabel had nowhere else to go, and upon receiving a letter from her father telling her to come to him, she had taken passage in the brig, Sunbeam, bound from New York to Havana, at which latter port the young girl expected to find Captain Markham's vessel.

A few days more and Mabel would have been safely on board the cruiser commanded by her father; but now upon the wake of the Sunbeam hung a ruthless foe—the vessel of a buccaneer.

"Capt'in, I think I knows yonder craft, although he don't show his colors yet," said the helmsman, addressing Captain Rodney.

"Who is he, Burdick?"

"It's ther feller as has gotten hisself a bad

name, sir. Ef I hain't mistaken, it are the Curse o' ther Coast."

"What!" said Captain Rodney, in surprise, and with a quick glance toward Mabel.

"I hain't aartin, capt'in, but I thinks it are that devil. His name is Rafael, yer know, an' he's allus bent on mischief. Ef it's him, then our jig's up."

"Where have you seen the schooner before, Burdick?"

"I see'd him when I was a-cruisin' in ther United States cutter Swamp-fox. He thought we was a merchant craft, and run us aboard at night; but when he diskivered his mistake, he backed out as pretty as a coquette at a dance, an' we wasn't able to catch him, although we doubled him in men an' guns. That was a year ago last June. Ef he shows his colors, I could tell, fur he carries a blood-red anchor in a black field."

"Run up the French flag, Mr. Barker, and we will see the banner he sails under," cried Captain Rodney, as Burdick, the helmsman, described the colors of the schooner known far and wide as the Curse of the Coast.

The ensign of France was at once sent to the mizzen peak by the first mate, and the breeze caught its folds and spread them out; but no answer came from the schooner, which was now not a league away, and still gaining on the brig, in spite of every stitch of canvas spread upon the swift vessel that would draw a thimbleful of wind.

"Give her the colors of Great Britain, Mr. Barker," said Captain Rodney, and down came the flag of the Frank to give place to that of the Briton.

Still no answer came from the schooner, and for the third time an ensign went to the brig's mizzen peak, and this time the Stars and Stripes caught the breeze.

Instantly a cry arose from all, for a roll of dark bunting was hoisted on the schooner, and while a huge black flag was shaken out, a puff of white smoke burst from the sharp bows and a solid shot came whizzing through the air.

"You are right, Burdick; there is the red anchor on the black field. Yonder fellow is the Curse of the Coast," said Captain Rodney, gloom spreading over his dark face.

"The Curse of the Coast, did you say, captain?"

"Yes, Miss Markham."

"Oh! I have heard so many terrible stories of that vessel," cried the maiden.

"And doubtless all of them true, miss, for he is said to be a very devil. He first cruised some years ago in the Mediterranean, and showed particular hatred toward American vessels of war, and though not strong enough to fight them, did them all the harm he could."

"Then he came to the Gulf, and his depredations have been such as to gain him the name of the Curse of the Coast," said Captain Rodney, and he added quickly:

"There comes another gun; I fear we are doomed; but we will fight to the last. Mr. Barker, beat to quarters, and I'll put the brig square before the wind, and perhaps we can hold our own until night. Miss Markham, you must go below."

"No, captain, I will not hide while my defenders are in danger; I will remain here," said the maiden, firmly.

The captain bestowed upon her a look of admiration for her pluck, and then turned away to put the brig before the wind.

For a few moments it was believed that the brig was gaining on the schooner, and hope rose high in every breast on board, for night was not far away; but this hope soon died away, for, though the pursuer's bows were buried deep, he came on at fearful speed, and gained as steadily as he had before the course was changed.

And, worse still, every time the sharp bows of the schooner rose on a wave there came a cloud of smoke, a deep roar, and a shot was hurled viciously, after the flying craft.

"By Heaven! the fellow sails like a witch! Ha! there goes my mizzen-top," cried Captain Rodney, and at his order half a dozen men sprang to work to clear away the wreck, for the mizzen-topmast had been cut in two by a solid shot.

As if improving with practice, the buccaneer's shots came more frequently and with great precision, cutting away the foretop also and raking the deck with fatal effect, for Mabel Markham buried her face in her hands as she saw two poor seamen cut down a few feet from her.

"Miss Markham, please go below; this is no place for you," again said Captain Rodney.

Instantly the fair face was raised, and the voice was firm as she replied:

"This is the place for me; I will remain on deck!" and the roar of another shot drowned further conversation, and a loud cry of agony from a man's lips, followed by a crash of timbers told that the aim of the buccaneer was still fatal.

Darkness was yet half an hour away; the schooner gained rapidly, and hardly half a mile now divided the two vessels. The case indeed seemed desperate, and Captain Rodney determined to at once change his course, and in spite of his small guns and few men to return the fire

of the pirate, hoping that some lucky shot of his howitzers might disable his cruel foe, and open an avenue of escape for the brig.

Instantly he gave the order to his crew to stand ready all, and the brig swept round, and felt the wind upon her quarter, while the guns were trained upon the schooner, and the combat began.

The buccaneer also changed his course; his huge sails were trimmed close, and from his guns burst roar after roar, as if in fury at having his foe turn upon him.

As calm as true courage could make her, and with flashing eyes, though pallid face, Mabel Markham stood on deck gazing upon the awful scene, while at her feet crouched a negress, her maid, who, unable to get her mistress to come into the cabin, had rushed upon deck to be by her side, and with trembling form, and closed eyes, awaited the end of the tragedy they all were playing.

"Miss Markham, will you have a closer view?" said Captain Rodney, and he handed his sea-glass to the maiden, who said, with a faint smile:

"The view is too close now for comfort, captain; but I accept your kindness, for I would read the face of my captor."

The old seaman smiled grimly in return, and replied bravely:

"Not yet is he victor, Miss Markham. There stands the chief, on the quarter-deck, and he has a cigar between his teeth."

Mabel Markham leveled the glass, and the words instantly broke from her lips:

"Can that man be a pirate?"

"One would think so, Miss Markham; he certainly is not a saint."

"Why, he is very young, and—"

"And very handsome, too, you were going to say. You are right; he is young and handsome, but his heart is cruelly debased," and Captain Rodney, now thoroughly aroused to fight unto the bitter end, again turned his attention to his vessel and crew.

Again did Mabel Markham bend her gaze, with the aid of the strong glass, upon the buccaneer chief, and saw that, as the captain had said, he was coolly smoking a cigar, and puffing forth the white clouds in curls above his head, while he paced to and fro with an easy grace and nonchalant manner that betokened utter indifference to danger.

CHAPTER III.

THE CURSE OF THE SEA.

As Mabel Markham continued to gaze upon the approaching buccaneer, she saw that his was a tall and elegant form, clad in a *neglige* suit of blue woolen shirt, trimmed with gold lace, white tuck pants, and a slouch hat, looped up in front in such a way as to let the light fall full upon his face.

It was a dark face, and Mabel could almost see the eyes flash—a face strangely handsome, and yet stern and resolute, while the mouth was hidden by a long, dark-brown mustache.

His hair, of the same hue as the mustache, was waving, and worn long, for it fell upon his collar, and this perhaps gave to his otherwise manly face a look almost effeminate; yet there was something in the look of the white gauntlet-covered hand, raised to remove the cigar from his lips, which indicated that the glove concealed an iron power that would show no tremor in the deadliest danger.

Suddenly Mabel saw the chief pause, and raise from the deck a glass which he turned upon the brig, and gazed intently, as if unmindful of the roar of the guns from both vessels, and the crashing of timbers, as the combatants neared each other, the merchantman standing on her course, and the corsair bearing rapidly down upon her, and not three cable lengths away.

The start that the young buccaneer gave as his eyes fell upon her, Mabel saw distinctly, and instinctively she lowered the glass from her eye, and her beautiful face was revealed.

A moment the buccaneer gazed upon that face, and then down went his glass to the deck, and loud rung his voice, heard distinctly on the brig, as he cried:

"Cease firing!"

Instantly the ringing command was obeyed, the roar of the schooner's guns ceased, and the smoke drifted away, leaving the graceful vessel visible to every eye on board the brig.

"He's up to some game of devilment; be ready, all, to repel boarders, for in spite of the rough sea, he intends to board," cried Captain Rodney, and then he called out: "Make the bull-dogs bark, lads! They are our only chance, for if he boards we are gone under."

Though the howitzers of the brig still rung out, and their iron hail continued to be hurled upon the schooner, no reply came from the buccaneer; he had evidently changed his plan of action.

At their guns still stood the pirate crew, stripped to the waist, and a motley set, ready for any deed of violence or bloodshed, and yet held in check by the eye of their young leader.

Then again Mabel raised her glass, and she saw the lips of the buccaneer chief part, as if in command.

Instantly the crew of the schooner left their guns, and with gleaming cutlasses in hand crowded toward the sharp bows, while their chief, with a few words to the man at the helm, went forward and was lost to sight.

"Miss Markham, again I beg you to go below," and Captain Rodney laid his hand upon the arm of the maiden.

"Again I say I will not. It were perhaps better that a stray bullet should kill me here, Captain Rodney," said Mabel, and the look that came into the eyes of the young girl, the old seaman read well—she would rather die there amid the excitement of the combat, than become the dishonored prize of a buccaneer chief.

With a determined glitter in his eyes Captain Rodney turned away, and loud rung his deep voice as he gave the order:

"Boarders to repel boarders!"

The two vessels were now close together, sailing with the wind upon their starboard quarter, and the schooner a little astern, and rapidly overhauling the brig, which was hugging the wind as close as she could.

The cruel faces of the pirates could now be seen distinctly, the light of the setting sun falling full upon them, and at their head was their young leader, a fresh cigar between his lips.

"Brig ahoy!" suddenly cried the buccaneer chief, in tones that rung ominously.

"Ahoy the pirate!" answered Captain Rodney, sullenly.

"What brig is that?" came the question, as the chief, by a wave of the hand, stilled the angry cries of his crew, at being called by the name they had so well earned.

"The Sunbeam—from New York to Havana; what schooner's that?" promptly replied Captain Rodney.

"The Curse of the Coast! Lay to, or I will board and take you!" came the stern command.

"Come on, then, you cursed outlaw, for I'll not lay to at your command," shouted Captain Rodney.

A yell of rage burst from the schooner's crowded deck, but a word from the chief quieted the tumult, and an order to the helmsman brought the pirate craft's bows over the taffrail of the brig.

"Fire!" shouted Captain Rodney, and as the flying forms of the buccaneers came down upon the deck of the brig, some of them fell, shot through the heart.

But, to the surprise of Captain Rodney and his brave crew, the buccaneers did not return the fire, but rushed forward, armed only with the cutlass, and at their head was their youthful leader, a gleaming weapon in his hand.

"Surrender, sir captain, and save slaughter!" cried the buccaneer chief, as he sprang forward and crossed the blade of the American.

The answer of Captain Rodney was to discharge his pistol full in the face of the chief, who staggered back an instant.

But the bullet merely cut a slight gash in the temple, and severed a lock of hair that fell to the deck, while as if infuriated at the wound, the chief pressed forward with fury, and struck the weapon of Captain Rodney from his hand.

The American captain felt that his end had come, yet he showed no sign of fear, and shouted to his men:

"Never mind me, lads; give them all they want!"

Instantly the chief's weapon was lowered, the murderous blow was not given, and he said, quickly:

"You are a brave man; I spare your life."

"Oh, sir, I thank you!"

It was Mabel Markham that spoke, and with outstretched hands she stood before the young buccaneer.

"Hold!"

The loud trumpet tones arrested every hand, and every buccaneer, at the stern order of their chief, stood like a statue, while the crew of the brig also remained quiet.

"Captain, surrender your ship, and your lives shall be spared. You are in my power, and had I not beheld a maiden on your deck, I could have sunk you with my guns," said the chief, firmly.

"And allow you to rob me of my all? Never, sir pirate," answered the American captain.

"It is foolhardy for you to resist, for I can sweep your decks in five minutes. See! Not half of my men are yet on the brig."

"And you will spare the lives of my men?" said Captain Rodney, as if realizing that he was indeed in the power of his enemy.

"I am no cutthroat, sir. Your life and the lives of your men shall be spared."

"And my fair lady passenger?"

"I am no villain—no harm shall befall her, sir," quickly responded the chief, as he cast a hasty glance at Mabel Markham, while his handsome face flushed, as though with shame.

"But my cargo you will rob me of?" asked Captain Rodney.

"A part of your cargo, yes—you carry an officer with dispatches from the United States Government to Captain Markham, of the sloop-of-war Sea Hawk, now awaiting you in Havana?"

"You are mistaken, sir—I carry no such offi-

cer. Miss—this lady," and Captain Rodney checked the name upon his tongue, "and her maid are my only passengers."

The chief turned his eyes again upon the beautiful face of Mabel Markham, and after an instant's silence, said, as though to himself:

"Can I have been misinformed?"

"You certainly have, sir, if you expected to find a bearer of dispatches on board the Sunbeam."

For an instant the buccaneer was silent, and seemed in deep thought, and then he asked, as though still doubtful:

"You are not deceiving me, are you, captain?"

"Upon my honor, no!"

"Then I have been misinformed; but can I ask the name of your lady passenger?"

Captain Rodney made no reply, and glanced toward the maiden, who said, firmly:

"My name is Mabel Markham, sir."

The young buccaneer started—his face flushed crimson, and then the blood quickly retreated and left him as pale as death.

"Are you the daughter of Captain Walter Markham, of the Sea Hawk?" and the chief turned to Mabel and raised his hat politely, while there was a tremor in his voice.

"I am, sir," and Mabel noted closely the effect of her words.

The chief took a short turn across the deck, and then halted once more before the maiden, while he said:

"Pardon me, Miss Markham; but do you bear dispatches from your Government to your father?"

"I do, sir. They were to be sent by Lieutenant Paul Melville, who was ordered to join my father's vessel; but he was detained by illness, I learned, and the Secretary of the Navy, whom I know well, intrusted the dispatches to my care."

"Will you surrender those dispatches to me, Miss Markham?"

"I will not, sir," and Mabel spoke with a determination that proved she meant what she said.

"Remember, I have the power to take them," said the chief, with some sternness of manner.

"True; yet you will not use that power."

"Why do you think so?" asked the buccaneer, raising his eyebrows curiously.

"I have read that in your face, sir. Corsair though you be, you would not insult a woman," replied Mabel, frankly.

The chief bowed his head, as though to hide the shame that swept over it, and said, quickly:

"You have read aright, lady—you dispatches are safe while in your keeping, yet—" and the corsair paused, and Mabel looked up with inquiring glance, as though for him to continue, which he did after a pause.

"Yet those dispatches concern me and mine vitally, and, as self-preservation is the first law of nature, I must prevent their being read by those for whom they are intended, at least until too late to do harm."

Then turning to Captain Rodney, the chief continued:

"Captain, your brig, its fair passenger and cargo are again free, but upon one condition, sir."

"Name it, sir," said Captain Rodney, struck by the strange manner of his captor.

"You are now but three short days' sail from Havana—promise me that you will not make that port within ten days, and my men shall at once leave your vessel."

"And I am free to go as you found me, excepting the harm that you have done to my vessel and crew?"

"You are, sir."

Captain Rodney glanced toward Mabel Markham, but he could not see that she knew why the buccaneer had released him on such easy terms; yet he thought he saw a look as though she wished to speak to him, and he said:

"Can I first speak with Miss Markham, sir?"

"No! Do you accept my terms, or refuse?" sternly said the chief.

"If I refuse?"

"I shall turn your cargo over to my men, scuttle your brig, and set you and your crew adrift in your boats to find the nearest land, while I take upon myself the duty of seeing that Miss Markham reaches Havana in safety."

There was no doubting the tone of the buccaneer—he meant what he said, and Captain Rodney quickly answered:

"I accept your terms, sir."

"You will swear that your vessel shall not make the port of Havana until after the tenth day from this, and that Miss Markham shall not be put on board any other vessel you may meet going thither, or deliver her dispatches into other hands than those for whom they are intended?"

"I swear it, sir."

"It is well! If you break your oath, Captain Rodney, I will track you to your death. Your vessel is free, sir; good-evening!"

Turning toward Mabel the young chief caught her eye fixed earnestly upon him; but he simply raised his hat while the maiden said, earnestly:

"From my inmost heart I thank you, sir; but,

tell me, are you indeed he whom men call the Curse of the Coast?"

"My name is Rafael, lady; my schooner has won the unenviable name you refer to."

"Then, Captain Rafael shall I remember you; and, thank God! I can bless and not curse you," and Mabel held forth her hand.

The buccaneer merely touched the tips of the slender fingers, uncovering his hand ere he did so; and raising his hat he turned away, just as the sun's disk disappeared in the sea.

"To your schooner, men!"

But the men did not move. During the conversation between their chief and his captives mischief had been brewing; the lawless crew would not tamely yield so rich a prize, and mutiny shone in every savage face.

"Did you hear? To your schooner!" again ordered the chief, and in tones that were threatening, for he well knew that he stood on a volcano that might burst forth in an instant.

But not a man moved; yes, one stepped to the front—a tall, brawny fellow, with muscled arms and breast, and savage, cruel face.

"Well, sir?"

The tone of the chief changed as the man confronted him; he seemed strangely calm when his eyes fell upon one who had dared brave his anger.

"Captain Rafael, we risked our lives for this prize, and having won both booty and beauty we don't intend to give it up," said the man, in hoarse tones.

"I am to understand that you dispute my authority, am I?" and the voice of the chief was devoid of all anger, to the surprise of the most interested listeners, especially to Captain Rodney, who feared, after all, the buccaneer would play him false, and say that he could not control his men.

"You will understand that we are going to have this prize—ain't we, boys?" and the mutineer turned to the crew, who gave a ready assent, and an ominous silence fell upon all; the next instant the volcano might burst forth in fury, and human passions break into a storm that no hand of man could stay.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BUCCANEER AT BAY.

At the assent of the pirate crew to the question of the leading mutineer, every eye turned upon Rafael, the chief.

Was this a subterfuge to rob the brig, after all?

Was the chief indeed a traitor to his word?

Such were the thoughts that flashed through the minds of Captain Rodney and his men, who now stood with arms ready and teeth set, awaiting the dread order they felt must come.

Will he prove equal to this desperate situation?

Such was the thought of Mabel Markham, who did not for a moment hold mistrust of the young buccaneer chief.

Yet her heart throbbed violently, and she felt as though she would faint away, so great was her dread of what might come.

From the angry faces in his front, the chief suddenly turned toward Mabel, and there was not the slightest shadow on his brow, or tremor in his tones, as he said, quietly:

"Miss Markham, will you kindly go into the cabin?"

"No; thank you for thinking of me; but I will not leave the deck; let me face the worst here."

An instant a cloud swept over the chief's face, but it was gone as quickly as it came, and bowing politely, he said:

"As you please; but I wished to spare you an unpleasant scene."

Then he turned again toward the mutineer, yet not quick enough to hide the sudden pressure of his lips and threatening glitter in his eyes, which Captain Rodney, as well as Mabel, saw.

Stepping lightly to one side, so as not to have the maiden behind him, the chief stood confronting the mutineers, looking like a tiger about to spring upon his prey.

His eyes fairly blazed, his form was drawn to its full height, and his right hand dropped upon his sword-hilt, while the left rested upon the butt of a pistol.

Suddenly, in a voice that rung clear, sharp and stern, he shouted:

"Back to your vessel, you rebellious hounds! back, I say!"

A number of the pirates shrunk from before those blazing eyes, and from that threatening arm; but the leader of the mutineers, though his face paled visibly, still held his ground, and a few of the more reckless of his comrades stood close beside him.

The ringleader evidently expected further parley with his chief, and was about to speak, as though in defense of his action; but the keen blade of Rafael whirled in the air, and with the bound of an enraged tiger he sprung forward.

A cry of terror broke from the lips of the mutineer. He was armed, yet he had no time to draw a weapon, and he could but shriek out in horror at the death he knew no power could save him from.

With tremendous force the cutlass fell upon the crouching form, and a grating sound followed as it crashed through bone and flesh.

Then, ere the limp form fairly struck the deck, Rafael sprung over it, and confronted the now cowering, terror-stricken crew nearest him, while the others, with one accord, began to clamber back upon the schooner, some of them, in their haste and terror, missing their hold and falling with a heavy splash into the rough waters.

But there was no occasion for the chief to deal another blow; his crew was conquered completely, and those in danger of the blood-stained cutlass cried lustily for mercy.

"To your kennels, hounds!" and the words were hissed through the shut teeth, yet were heard and obeyed precipitately, the chief pointing with his dripping cutlass until the last mutineer had returned to the schooner.

Then, with every trace of anger gone from his face, Rafael turned to Captain Rodney.

"Now, sir, you are at liberty to go on your way, and I regret exceedingly that your fair passenger should have been compelled to witness scenes such as we have just gone through."

"And you, sir, will you trust yourself alone among that vile crew?" asked Mabel, earnestly.

"Assuredly; one who is at war with the world should not shrink from his own crew, be they ever so vile and murderous; but they are conquered now. Only a few of them allowed their love of gold to get the best of their judgment. Farewell."

Ere another word could be spoken, the young chief sprung upon the bulwarks of the brig, and from thence upon his schooner, when he gave the order to cast loose the grapnels, and the two vessels swung apart.

"Miss Markham, see there!"

It was Captain Rodney that spoke, and he pointed through the increasing darkness to a vessel coming rapidly toward them, and not a quarter of a mile away.

In the excitement, none on board the brig or schooner had noticed the stranger's approach.

"It is an American, and a vessel of war," said Mr. Barker, whose eye had caught sight of the sail as soon as the captain spoke.

"And the schooner will be captured, for she is three times the size of the buccaneer's craft," said Mabel, and there seemed a shade of anxiety in her tones.

"Yes; the buccaneer can never escape from yonder vessel—Ha! they see the stranger—hark! Hear how the chief's voice rings out, calling his men to set sail and go to quarters. By Heaven! he will not surrender without a fight," cried Captain Rodney.

"A fight will be useless, and we will have a hand in his capture," and the mate started to call a crew to the guns bearing upon the schooner.

"Hold! Mr. Barker, attend to setting sail on the brig, and let the gun, alone," cried Captain Rodney, sternly.

"And give the pirate a chance to escape?" asked the mate, in surprise.

"If he can escape from yonder vessel let him do it. I shall not raise a hand to prevent him," returned Captain Rodney, firmly.

The mate seemed still more surprised, and Captain Rodney continued:

"Yonder man, pirate though he is, certainly acted nobly toward us, and his courage alone saved us from death when his crew mutinied, and I shall not be the one to aid in his capture and death. Mr. Barker, go forward to your duties, sir—I wish to get the brig on her course again."

The mate went off in no amiable mood, while Mabel said, promptly:

"Captain Rodney, you are a noble man, and I thank you, sir, for not turning your guns upon one whom we certainly have cause to remember kindly, pirate though he be; but the schooner will be taken, I fear."

"I hope it will be, Miss Markham, and yet I would hate to see that brave and handsome fellow swung up to the yard-arm. See! how shrewd he is—he is keeping the brig between himself and the cruiser, and at the same time spreading all sail to escape—ha! there hails the cruiser," and across the waters came a hoarse voice through a trumpet:

"Ahoy, the brig, ahoy!"

"Ho! the cruiser!" answered Captain Rodney through his trumpet.

"What brig is that?"

"The Sunbeam! from New York to Havana!" promptly replied the captain.

"What schooner is that yonder?"

Captain Rodney hesitated an instant, and again came the question:

"Ho! the Sunbeam! what schooner is that to leeward?"

"A buccaneer—after a long chase and short action he boarded me; but he did me little harm," returned Captain Rodney.

"Doubtless. He saw a bull-dog after him, and run like a cowardly cur," replied the speaker on the cruiser, in a tone of considerable pride.

The cruiser, a large sloop-of-war, was now close up to the brig, and under all canvas that she could spread, was dashing away in pursuit of the schooner, which had thrown her sails

wing-and-wing, and was flying away before the wind at tremendous speed, well knowing that the guns of her pursuer would open upon her as soon as she had passed the Sunbeam.

As the cruiser swept by the brig her bow-guns opened with a terrible rattle, and the roar of the flying shot was distinctly heard on the deck of the Sunbeam, which was still laying to, while the crew were repairing damages.

But the first shots from the cruiser flew wide, and the little schooner still rushed on, without returning the fire of her huge adversary.

"See, Captain Rodney, the schooner has changed her course! She seems coming back toward us," cried Mabel, suddenly, and in an instant the captain was beside her, glass in hand.

"By Jove! I don't wonder at the change of course; he was running into a greater danger. There, just where my finger is pointing, Miss Markham, do you not see the hull and rigging of a large ship?"

"Yes, I see it distinctly, and it is within half a mile of the schooner."

"True, and the buccaneers, in watching their enemy astern, failed to see the one in their front. There go her guns, and see! as her deck lights up she displays a large frigate. And she is an American, from her rig. By Heaven! but the buccaneer is in a hornets' nest now."

Mabel Markham made no reply, yet trembled from head to foot, and watched the effect of gun after gun fired upon the flying schooner from the two vessels of war, and there was hope in her heart that the buccaneer might escape; yet how could he, surrounded by such overwhelming danger? she thought.

"It seems cruel for two huge vessels to pound away at a little one," she said, almost indignantly, and then her face flushed with shame when she remembered that her sympathy was on the side of a pirate—the terrible free rover whose deeds had gained for him the name of the Curse of the Coast, and whom all people hated for his cruelty.

"Yet he was not cruel to me—no, he saved me from self-destruction, for I would have taken my own life had those mutineers gained the deck—and he did the brig no harm, after he saw that a woman was on deck! He certainly cannot be the cruel monster men call him, if he behaves with others as he did with us."

"No, he is noble at heart, and some dire misfortune, some crime, committed in a passionate moment, perhaps some deed of which he is accused, and was really innocent, has driven him to be an outlaw. Oh! Heaven have mercy! how savagely the heavy guns play upon the little craft; but why do I, Mabel Markham, hold this sympathy for a buccaneer—a man whom I have seen but once?" and with a gesture, as if of impatience at herself, the maiden turned away, until an exclamation from Captain Rodney caused her once more to bend her gaze upon the chase.

"The buccaneer is at bay, Miss Markham. Hear how his guns rattle, and see how like devils his crew seem as the blaze of the cannon lights up the deck."

"Yes; but is it not a terrible fight, captain?"

"It is, and a plucky one indeed, to behold that little schooner still struggling to escape, and at the same time firing upon her large adversaries. That man has wonderful courage, Miss Markham."

"You mean the outlaw?"

"Of course; it is a pity he is an outlaw; but, in spite of what men say about him, I do not believe him half as bad as he is painted. His position is critical now in the extreme, and he had better surrender. Ha! he is giving it up; his foes are too many for him—poor fellow," and as Captain Rodney spoke, the schooner was seen to suddenly change her course, and her sharp bows swept up into the wind.

"By the Lord Harry!"

"What is it, captain?" cried Mabel, anxiously.

"Why, the fellow is not dead yet, for he has not come to, as I supposed, but is standing like a race-horse on a track that will elude the frigate, throw the sloop on his quarter, and bring him pretty near to us. That was a clever maneuver, and if he is not crippled he may yet escape in the darkness."

Mabel Markham felt her heart give one great throb of hope, and eagerly her eyes turned upon the flying schooner, which, with every sail set that would draw, was plowing through the waves still unhurt by the hot fire poured upon it, and headed so as to keep the guns of each vessel bearing upon her stern quarters.

"The elements are going to battle also, Miss Markham," and Captain Rodney pointed to dark clouds rapidly rolling across the sky, and trailing with them a thin mist.

"Then there will be little hope for the schooner?"

"On the contrary, these little vessels care no more for rough weather, than a duck does for an April shower, and it may aid the buccaneer to escape, if it comes on to blow hard. Hark to the roar of those guns, and see how the schooner promptly replies! What do you say, Mr. Barker?"

"The frigate is signaling, sir."

"Ah, I see—he says fire upon the schooner; but I must to look my own safety, and get my

repairs done before the storm comes on. Signal back, Mr. Barker, that we are disabled."

"I can bring the stern guns to bear—"

"Did you hear, Mr. Barker?"

The mate turned sullenly away, and the captain again joined Mabel, who still watched the running fight with the deepest interest.

"Oh, captain, they have struck the schooner!" suddenly cried Mabel, as a shot from the sloop was heard crashing through the timbers of the buccaneer.

"Yet the plucky fellow still stands on. Ha! there goes a broadside from the sloop—ay, and another from the frigate. Now, little schooner, if you are not knocked out of the water, you bear a charmed life," cried Captain Rodney, while the terrific roar of the guns and rushing of iron hail drowned his words.

Then in the midst of the thunder of cannon and howling of shot, was heard the crashing of timbers, and cries of anguish, as the storm of iron struck the little craft.

A moment of suspense followed, and then the smoke drifted away, and every eye scanned the waters—yet the schooner was nowhere visible.

"They have sunk her; she has gone down with all on board," said Captain Rodney, while Mabel still strained her eyes across the sea, in the vain hope of seeing the schooner's raking masts covered with their huge white sails.

And as she looked the mist grew deeper, and the roll of thunder followed the roar of the guns, and the storm was almost upon them, while Captain Rodney's voice was heard to put the brig under storm-sails, as, with her repairs completed, she now forged through the waters.

When the mist and increased darkness shut out the sight of the frigate and sloop-of-war, Mabel turned away, a pain at her heart, for the loss of the schooner, and seeing that the brig was under way, she asked:

"What is your course now, captain?"

"I will stand to the eastward, Miss Markham, for several days, and then return slowly toward Havana."

"You will then keep your promise made the buccaneer?"

"Assuredly; his being dead does not release me. I will not enter the harbor of Havana under ten days."

Mabel Markham made no reply; but descended to the cabin, and throwing herself upon a divan, became buried in deep and painful reverie, in which came constantly before her eyes a fearless, handsome face, with sad eyes, and long waving hair, struggling for life with the mad waves, which were stained with the crimson stream that poured from his wounds.

CHAPTER V. THE DISPATCHES.

TOWARD the close of a summery afternoon in the early part of the present century, a graceful, swift-sailing sloop-of-war stood into the harbor of Havana, and after belching forth a salute from her guns to the fortress of El Moro, dropped anchor in an out-of-the-way spot, as though intending to remain for some time the guest of the formidable Spanish seaport.

At her mizzen peak floated the stars and stripes, which would have made known her American nationality had her long, lean hull and trim rig failed to do so.

Hardly had the vessel-of-war dropped anchor when another craft, bearing the stars and stripes proudly above her decks, sailed into the gun-guarded harbor, and let fall her anchors, not a cable-length from the sloop-of-war.

This latter vessel was a small brig, graceful and saucy in look, and presented the appearance of having been roughly handled, for in several places her bulwarks were crushed in, and the rigging had undergone numerous hasty repairs, that would indicate that an iron hail had swept over the devoted craft.

Upon her deck stood, besides her commander and crew, a maiden of surpassing beauty, and a negro, both of whom were watching with interest the beauties of the harbor and city spread out before them.

"That sloop-of-war, Miss Markham, is the same that chased, and aided in sinking the buccaneer," and the commander of the brig turned toward the maiden.

"I think you are right, Captain Rodney, and, in spite of our ten days' cruise, she has only beaten us in an hour or two, as you remember we saw her enter the harbor."

"Your father's vessel is a sloop, I believe, Miss Markham?"

"Yes, sir—the Sea Hawk."

"Then that must be the Sea Hawk, for I see no other American vessel-of-war in the harbor. Here is my glass—see if you recognize your father among that group of officers upon the quarter-deck."

Mabel hastily seized the glass, and hardly had she leveled it before a cry of joy escaped her lips.

"Yes, it is the Sea Hawk. My father is standing on her deck. How strange that we should be hailed by his vessel ten days ago, and not know it! I will at once go on board, Captain Rodney, and you must accompany me, for

Captain Markham has much to thank you for, in the good care that you have taken of his daughter."

Captain Rodney at once yielded, a boat was lowered and brought to the gangway, and ten minutes after was on the way to the Sea Hawk.

Ere the boat reached the sloop, Captain Markham, a tall, handsome man of fifty, recognized his daughter, and waved his hand, while he went to the side to meet her.

The meeting of father and daughter was a joyous one, and the maiden was at once ushered into the cabin, while Captain Markham warmly thanked Captain Rodney for his kindness to Mabel, and from him learned of the capture of the Sunbeam by the Curse of the Coast, and the noble conduct of the buccaneer captain.

"Why, I am almost sorry I aided in sinking the fellow," said Captain Markham.

"He was then certainly sunk, was he, papa?"

"Assuredly; the frigate delivered a broadside at the same time that I did, for we feared, after all, the daring fellow might escape, and the iron did for the schooner. We cruised all around afterward and could not find even a spar of the craft, and after the storm blew over, I remained in the same latitude for several days, fearing that the pirate might have taken to his boats, and, you know, these fellows are like a cat, they have nine lives; but I found nothing to reward our search."

"He doubtless went at once to the bottom under the double broadside," remarked Captain Rodney.

"I feel no doubt of it now; but, Mabel, you say you have dispatches for me, and that the buccaneer knew they were on the Sunbeam?"

"Yes, sir; Lieutenant Melville, whoever he may be, was to bring them, but was delayed by illness, I believe, and the Secretary of the Navy intrusted them to me, knowing I was coming at once to you."

"How in the name of goodness did the buccaneer know of this?"

"That is a mystery, papa; but certain it is he did know, and seemed most anxious regarding them. In fact, he released the brig upon condition that Captain Rodney would not make Havana under ten days. Here they are, sir," and Mabel took from her trunk the leather dispatch-bag, which Captain Markham hastily broke the seal of and opened, after excusing himself to Captain Rodney.

"I am sorry," he said, as he glanced over the papers, "that Lieutenant Melville failed to come, for he is spoken of here as a young, but excellent officer, and is a late appointment in the navy, from the merchant service, receiving his commission for saving the life of an American naval officer from drowning; besides, the fire of the buccaneer cost me the life of my senior lieutenant, and I was already short of officers."

"The buccaneer then did you some damage?" said Captain Rodney.

"Yes, I lost one officer, a gunner and several men. He fired with wonderful precision, and also cut away some of my rigging—ha! what is this?" and Captain Markham ran hastily over, in a low tone, a letter he held in his hand; after which he said, with some excitement:

"The secret is out—the mystery solved—regarding the desire of the buccaneer to get possession of these dispatches, for herein I am ordered to proceed at once to several piratical rendezvous in these waters and the Caribbean sea and wage an untiring war against the corsair bands, by attacking their strongholds."

"These papers give me the names of several of these island retreats of the buccaneers, received from a captured pirate, who awaits in prison the proof that he has told the truth, upon which proof he is to be pardoned by the President for his crimes."

"One place is set down as the supposed retreat of Rafael the Rover, otherwise known as the Curse of the Coast; but it is not assured that the island herein named is his rendezvous—ah, here it says that Lieutenant Paul Melville, who was for some time the captive of the buccaneers, will be of the greatest assistance to me in my search, and the work laid out for me. Now I understand why Rafael was so anxious to get hold of these dispatches, knowing, from his spy, which he certainly has at Government headquarters, that such orders were to be sent to me, and, failing to get these papers, he made you, captain, swear not to enter Havana for ten days, in which time he could warn all of his fellow buccaneers of the threatened danger. The whole thing is clear now."

"And as he is dead you can easily carry out your orders, without fear of the buccaneers being forewarned," said Captain Rodney.

"Yes; I will refit at once; but I wish that Melville had come. Keep seated, captain."

"No, thank you: I must return to my vessel," and Captain Rodney arose to take his departure.

"Well, we will have another glass of wine together, and if I can serve you while in port be certain to let me know. I shall, now that there is no danger to dread from the buccaneers being warned, be here for a week, as I wish to refit thoroughly, as pirate-hunting is no child's sport. Remember you dine with us to-morrow, captain."

"I shall not forget it, sir; now I will say good-afternoon."

"And we will escort you to the deck," said Mabel.

As they left the cabin a shadow fell upon the deck, as a vessel sailed between the sloop and the declining sun.

Instinctively the eyes of the three fell upon the craft—a large schooner, with every indication that she had seen hard weather on her voyage, and shot-marks upon hull and rigging.

"If that fellow was differently armed, carried studding-sails and new canvas, I would swear it was the Curse of the Coast," remarked Captain Rodney, as he glanced at the stranger.

"No, she carries the Mexican flag, you see, and is one of those traders from Vera Cruz. They all look like buccaneers, and, in fact, I believe do a little buccaneering in a quiet way upon coasting craft. He is going to anchor near us and be sociable."

As Captain Markham spoke Captain Rodney went over the side into his waiting boat, promising to return to dine the next day, and wondering why Mabel had suddenly become so absent-minded as to almost forget to bid him adieu.

Had he followed the eyes of the maiden, he would have beheld them fastened upon a tall form, that seemed to be the commander of the Mexican schooner, while her lips muttered:

"If that man is not Rafael the Rover, he is strangely like him—the same form, yet clothed in rough attire; the same long, flowing dark hair—how strange that two men should be so alike," and at a call from her father, Mabel descended again to the cabin of the ship that was to be her home, for a seaman's daughter, and motherless, no other home did she know.

CHAPTER VI.

THE UNWILLING PRISONER.

IN the saloon of a Havana *cafe*, or *pulperia*, upon the night following the arrival of the Sea Hawk and Sunbeam in port, sat a man at a small table, enjoying a glass of Spanish wine in selfish loneliness, for no jolly comrade was with him to partake of the contents of the long-necked bottle.

In the room were others, laughing, chatting and drinking, and French and English conversation was heard as well as Spanish, proving that the saloon was the resort of foreigners visiting the city of Havana.

Upon them the eyes of the solitary drinker would often turn, and then wander toward the door, as though he was expecting some one in whom he held interest; for, as person after person arrived, and they were not known to him, a gesture of impatience would he make by striking the table sharply with his glass.

The one thus waiting was a man above the medium height, possessed of a well-knit frame, attired in English seaman's garb, and his face was darkly bronzed and bearded.

Suddenly his eyes were riveted upon two persons who entered together, and one of whom was recognizable as a Spaniard, and a seaman of the upper class, while his companion was a young man of fine appearance, clad in a naval cap and white duck suit.

As though acquainted with the place, the Spaniard led the way directly to the host, who greeted him as an old friend, exclaiming:

"You are welcome back, *amigo*—and what a rapid run you have had!"

"Yes, my vessel sails like the wind," answered the seaman in Spanish, the language in which he had been addressed by the host, Pedro Nunez.

"The lads say she is a witch for sailing, *senor capitan*; but is this your friend?" and Pedro motioned toward the companion of the Spanish captain.

"Yes, Pedro; this is an American *senor* that has been my passenger from the States, and he desires quarters with you for a day or two, for which he has the *pesos* to pay."

"He shall have the best my house can give. Be seated, *senor*, and you, *capitan*, and I will drink your very good health in a bottle of my best," and while the host went to fetch the wine, the two men took a seat at the next table to the solitary individual, who, since their coming into the saloon, had not taken his eye off of the young man introduced as an American.

So busy was he, in fact, in watching the American, that he failed to notice the arrival of another personage, who touched him on the shoulder, ere he was aware of his presence.

Instantly the man was on his feet, his hand thrust into his blouse-pocket; but, recognizing, at a glance, the new-comer, he said quickly, in Spanish:

"Ha! it is you, Gomez. Be seated, for you are behind time—I will order more wine, for your delay has caused me to dispose of the bottle before me."

The new-comer, a short thickset Cuban, took a seat quietly, and a fresh bottle of wine having been placed before the two, they began a conversation in a low tone, alternately raising their eyes toward the Spanish captain and American seated at the neighboring table.

Presently the Spanish captain arose, and telling the host to look well after his friend, bade

him good-night, and left the saloon, leaving the American still idly drinking his wine.

"Now, Gomez, you leave also," and the last comer also rose and departed, and the English seaman was again alone.

A moment he remained in silence, and then, addressing the American, said, pleasantly:

"Sir American, as we both speak the same tongue, and our nations have just closed a cruel war, suppose we shake hands, bury all enmity, and drink a bottle of wine together?"

The American at first seemed as if about to rebuff the advance of the Englishman; but thinking better of it, arose and took the seat lately occupied by the Cuban, while he returned:

"True, we might as well bury the hatchet and be friends, now that England and the United States are no longer at war together."

The Englishman at once summoned Pedro to bring more wine, and the two entered into conversation, which lasted for some time, when the American arose and said he would take a stroll and look over the harbor, as he expected to find a vessel there in which he was interested.

"As I care not to retire I will join you, if agreeable," said the Englishman, and the two men left the *cafe* together, the American promising Pedro to return at bed-time.

Together they walked toward the harbor, the Englishman seeming to direct the way, yet with no apparent consciousness of so doing, and after twenty minutes' promenade they found themselves at the water's edge, and at a point that commanded a good view of the harbor, dotted with a hundred vessels.

The spot where they stood was lonely, and only a dim light some distance off was visible, showing that the street was used only for business by day.

"Well, it is too dark for me to see any particular vessel to-night, and there seem to be no dwellers hereabouts to give me information, so I will return," said the American, after casting a quiet glance over the harbor.

"My vessel lies at anchor, a cable's length from here; will you accompany me on board?" asked the Englishman.

"No, thank you, not to-night. Another time we will, I hope, renew the acquaintance begun to-night. My name you know, and I will be at *Senor Pedro's* for several days, so, as the Spaniards say, I will bid you *buenos noches*, *senor*," and the American turned to go, but an iron grasp was upon him, and the threatening muzzle of a revolver was pointed in his face, while the stern voice of his companion said:

"Move one inch, make one call, and you are a dead man!"

The American seemed thrown off his guard for a moment, but, rallying, he said, quickly, and with a sneer:

"I have been mistaken; you are then but a robber?"

"I am one who will rob you of your life if you do not obey my every command," hissed the other.

"You hold the game in your hand, sir. I have no desire to have my brains spattered around; so what is it you wish of me?"

"I wish you to accompany me aboard my vessel. I invited you to go willingly and you refused, now you shall go by force."

"Ha! I am to be kidnapped, then? This is worth struggling against," cried the American, yet before he could move, his companion gave a low call, and three men sprung from the shadows of a house near by and joined him.

"Now, sir, will you come quietly and take your chances for life, or will you render death certain by resistance?"

The American saw that he was entrapped, and he knew from what he had seen of his captor, that he would take his life on the instant he resisted, and sullenly he replied:

"I will accompany you; but what you wish of me I am at a loss to know. If it is gold you want, take what I have and let me go."

"It is not your gold, but yourself. Come on," and still keeping his iron grasp upon his prisoner, he drew him along toward the water, followed by the three men who had come at his call, and one was the Cuban, Gomez, who had joined him in the *cafe* of *Pedro Nunez*.

"Here is the boat, *senor*," said Gomez, and the party came to a halt upon the bank, against which lay a small boat, containing a single occupant.

"Get in, sir," said the Englishman, and the American hesitated and glanced quickly around him, as though calculating the chances of escape.

"Beware, sir; if you make a move toward your freedom you should die on the instant," said the leader of the party, and as if seeing that an attempt to escape would bring speedy death, the American stepped into the boat and was at once followed by the others.

"Now, lads, pull for the schooner," said the leader, seating himself in the stern-sheets, and away over the dark waters shot the little boat, winding in and out among the vessels at anchor, and passing under the bows of the American sloop-of-war *Sea Hawk*, to, a moment after, run alongside of the little craft that had come into port flying the Mexican flag.

In perfect silence the boat was hauled up to

the stern davits, the dark sails were let fall, the anchor raised, and silently, like a huge shadow, the schooner glided out of the harbor toward the open sea.

CHAPTER VII.

PIRATE-HUNTING.

A WEEK after the arrival in port of the *Sea Hawk* she was ready to sail, and Captain Markham was only awaiting the evening breeze to stand to sea, upon his mission of pirate-hunting, upon which his Government had ordered him, for the buccaneers were committing great depredations upon the merchant marine in Southern waters.

Standing upon the deck, with her father, and watching for the last boat from the shore, was Mabel Markham, whose freedom from danger had brought back the color to her cheeks, and the brightness to her eyes, and yet, in their liquid blue lingered a far-away look, as though she still dreamed of the past, and recalled that stormy night at sea, when amid the roar of cannon and crashing of iron-splintered timbers, a dark, handsome face had gone down beneath the wild waters, and a brave though sinful soul had perished forever.

"There comes the boat, papa, and there is a strange officer in it," said Mabel.

"You are right. Who can he be, I wonder?"

A moment after the boat came alongside the *Sea Hawk*, and there advanced toward Captain Markham and Mabel a tall, elegantly-formed young man, clad in the uniform of a senior lieutenant in the United States navy.

As he came toward them Mabel noticed that his clothes fitted his fine form faultlessly, and that he possessed a youthful, beardless face, and in fact was exceedingly handsome, his eyes being black and full of fire, while his hair was almost golden in hue.

Advancing to within a few feet of Captain Markham, he raised his hat politely, and said:

"Captain Markham, I presume?"

"Yes, sir, and I address—"

"My name is Paul Melville, sir; I was ordered—"

"Oh, yes, Lieutenant Melville; I am delighted to see you, sir. You were to have brought dispatches to me, and then become my senior lieutenant, but illness detained you, and my fair *aide* here brought the papers—my daughter, Lieutenant Melville."

At the introduction the young officer bowed low, and as he raised his eyes he caught those of the maiden fixed intently upon him, and his face slightly flushed, for Mabel held a world of power in those blue orbs of hers, and it was with more than common interest that she gazed upon the young officer, for there was a strange fascination in his face for her, and she felt that from that moment they would be friends.

"Yes, sir, I learned that the dispatches I was to have been the bearer of had been intrusted to far better hands; but I was delayed by illness, and have only now arrived here. My luggage came aboard in that boat with me, sir, and I am now ready for duty, as soon as I have given you these dispatches, sent to you, Captain Markham," and Lieutenant Melville took from an inner pocket a bundle of official papers and handed them to his commander, who said, pleasantly:

"You are prompt, lieutenant, and your services were very much needed, for I am short of officers; but I will leave you to the care of my daughter, while I go into the cabin and glance over these documents. I suppose you know what my orders are?"

"Yes, sir; to hunt up the buccaneer strongholds and destroy them."

"You are right, and the secretary says you, having been a prisoner among the buccaneers, can greatly aid me."

"Yes, sir, I was for years among the pirates, and know their haunts pretty well."

"Good! When I come on deck I will make you acquainted with your brother officers. By the way, have you any acquaintances on board ship?"

"Not one, sir. I have been but a short time in the naval service, you perhaps are aware."

"So the secretary writes, and got your rank from gallant services rendered. Well, sir, we do not think any the less of you because you were not reared on an armed deck, especially if you prove yourself the seaman you are reported to be. Now, Mabel, I leave Lieutenant Melville to your care," and Captain Markham entered his cabin to look over his dispatches, while the maiden and the young officer began to pace the deck, Paul Melville receiving many searching glances from both officers and men, for the latter were anxious to see what kind of man their new "luff" was to be, and universally decided in his favor, in spite of his youth; but the epauletted brotherhood held a great deal of envy in their glances, for it was exceedingly apparent that the lieutenant was a strikingly handsome man, and also evident that Mabel Markham received him from the first with marked kindness, and every unmarried man on board was already desperately in love with the maiden.

In half an hour Captain Markham returned on deck, and at once presented the officers of

the *Sea Hawk* to their new lieutenant; after which orders were given to get under way and stand out to sea.

At once assuming his position, Paul Melville's deep voice rung through the ship, giving his orders in tones that proved to all that he knew his duties thoroughly, and placed him at once on a footing of superiority with the crew, who now felt perfect confidence in him.

Out of the cannon-guarded harbor, past the frowning *Moro Castle*, and thence into the blue, open waters, sped the *Sea Hawk*, bound upon her dangerous mission—to hunt to the death the cruel buccaneers, who so boldly flaunted their flag before the guns of the very vessels of war sent in pursuit of them.

When the vessel had gained a good offing, Captain Markham called his officers into his cabin and made known the object of his cruise, at the same time asking Paul Melville to give his views upon the subject as to what was best to be done.

In a few words the young officer made known the localities of the various strongholds of which he knew, and the strength of the buccaneer garrisons at them, and after some further conversation it was decided to steer first to an island in the Caribbean sea, that Paul Melville said had been for years a pirate rendezvous, and where he had himself been held as a prisoner for some time.

"The island harbor is doubtless concealed, and dangerous of access," said Captain Markham.

"It certainly is, sir, yet I can run the sloop in, for there is depth of water sufficient for a ship of the line."

"What is the strength of the pirates, Melville?"

"Some fifty generally remain there, and they have half a dozen guns of heavy caliber, two of them forty-two's, commanding the entrance to the land-locked harbor. A look-out is kept, but trusting in the safety of the retreat he is generally asleep, and we can run in by night, and wake the pirates up with our guns at daybreak."

"A good plan, and you shall command the vessel on the cruise, so go on deck and head for the pirate isle," and the council broke up, and the *Sea Hawk's* bow was pointed south-west, and several days after, just at twilight the look-out at the mast-head sighted land.

"It is the pirate isle. We can make the harbor shortly after midnight, with this breeze," announced Paul Melville to Captain Markham, who was by his side, with Mabel leaning upon his arm.

"And you were a captive among the buccaneers, it is said, lieutenant?" remarked Mabel.

"Yes, Miss Markham."

"What a romantic life you have had! Please tell me of it."

"Of my life, Miss Markham, or my captivity among the buccaneers?" calmly answered the lieutenant.

"As piracy seems to be the general topic, let me know more about your stay among the free rovers, and how you came to be their captive."

"Certainly, if you care to be bored by a leaf from my life. You remember the capture of the *Dolphin* some years ago?"

"Yes, when the *Curse of the Coast* took her upon the high seas, and set her crew and passengers adrift in the boats?"

"The same. Well, I was then taken by the buccaneers, and during my stay among them I served as a sub-officer, for I felt that I could only, by such a course, save my life; but as soon as I could do so I made my escape, and returned again to the United States, swearing vengeance against my cruel captors."

"And you remained some time among them?" asked Mabel, with interest.

"Yes; three years it was before I could escape."

"And then how did you escape, can I ask?"

The young officer's face flushed, Mabel thought at the question, but he answered, quietly:

"A young girl, the daughter of a buccaneer, seemed to feel for my sad fate, and aided me in flying from the island."

"And she fled with you?" continued Mabel, with increased interest.

"Alas, yes; but it was a rough, stormy night, and my little sail-boat was unequal to the task of struggling with the waves, and was hurled upon her beam-ends, and both of us were thrown into the water."

"And what became of the maiden?"

"I was half-stunned by the shock, but succeeded in catching hold of the boat, which righted, and then searched for my poor companion; but the waters had engulfed her, and I saw her no more."

"And she was lost?" sadly said Mabel.

"Yes, poor girl; she was lost, and I was saved, for I was picked up by an English vessel the next day."

It was too dark for Mabel to see the face of the young man distinctly, yet she felt that it was stamped with grief, and the tremor of his voice proved how deeply he was moved; and the maiden was assured that the sailor had loved the poor girl, daughter of a buccaneer though she was.

The two were alone; her father had walked

away ere Paul had spoken of his capture by the pirates, and for some moments a silence followed between them; then Mabel asked:

"Did you ever know Rafael, the Rover?"

"Yes, Miss Markham; I knew him well."

"Was he the monster that men would paint him?" and Mabel showed more than ordinary interest in waiting for an answer.

"Rafael, the Rover, Miss Markham, had much to embitter his early life, I have heard; he felt that he had some real or fancied wrong to avenge, and his whole life he devoted to this one object, and where at first he had no desire to become a pirate, he soon drifted into lawless acts, and has since been the most feared of all the buccaneers that float the sea."

"Well, his career is ended now."

The young lieutenant started visibly and he turned toward Mabel quickly.

"Pardon me; but I do not understand."

"Then you have not heard of the capture of the *Sunbeam*, on which vessel I came to Havana, and the sinking of the *Curse of the Sea* afterward by this vessel and the United States frigate *Cornet*?" said Mabel, with surprise.

"I must confess my ignorance of the fact that the *Curse of the Sea* had been sunk. If that is the case there will be many who will rejoice."

"I do not; you may think it strange to hear me say."

"Can Miss Markham feel sympathy for a buccaneer?"

"I must admit that I do, and it is from no romantic sentimentality, but from a real feeling of pity for the man, and gratitude to him."

"Ah, he served you then?"

"More than I can tell you, and I do not believe him at heart an evil man. That he was a brave one, and noble in impulse, I had cause to know. Poor fellow, I deeply grieve for his fate, and would that it could have been otherwise, yet it were far better as it is than to have lost his life on the yard-arm."

Paul Melville made no reply, and the darkness kept Mabel from seeing the expression upon his face, and another long silence followed, which the lieutenant at length broke by preparing the ship for action, and getting all in readiness to run into the island harbor, for the land now loomed up boldly dead ahead.

Nearer and nearer crept the *Sea Hawk* to the buccaneer isle, and in silent patience men and officers stood at their posts, ever and anon turning their eyes upon Paul Melville, who paced the deck in thoughtful mood, now and then casting a quick glance over the vessel and toward the island they were so rapidly nearing.

"Captain Markham, I will take the helm now, sir, and I think we can get into the harbor without discovery, unless some ill-fortune has kept the look-out awake to-night."

"Do as you please, lieutenant; the ship is in your hands," answered the captain; and while Paul Melville took his place at the wheel, his commander and Mabel stood by his side, watching the rugged island and listening to the heavy roar of the waves as they rolled upon the rocky beach.

CHAPTER VIII. THE PIRATE ISLE.

UNDER shortened sail the *Sea Hawk* slowly neared the shore, running directly toward a point where a high bluff, that towered above the sloop's topmasts, overhung the sea, and looked like a solid wall.

But with perfect confidence Paul Melville held on his course, apparently unmindful of the anxious glances cast toward him by both officers and men, for that there could be an opening in that solid appearing wall of rock they could hardly believe, and many of them feared, in spite of their confidence in the lieutenant, that he was at fault in his reckonings.

And Captain Markham, as the *Sea Hawk* came under the shadow of the cliff, began to dread, and asked anxiously:

"Are you certain you are right, Melville?"

The lieutenant glanced toward Mabel, and saw by the manner she clung to her father's arm that she, too, was nervous, and he said, calmly:

"I am right, sir; but let the lead be thrown and you will find exactly seven fathoms of water where we now are. Mr. Ramsey, please get the depth here."

The midshipman addressed quickly threw the line, and promptly called out in a drawing tone:

"Seven fathoms!"

A sigh of relief came from many a manly breast, but not appearing to notice it, Paul Melville said:

"Throw again, Mr. Ramsey, and you will find six fathoms."

"Six fathoms!" sung out the middy.

"Continue to throw the lead, Mr. Ramsey, and you will find that we shoal rapidly."

"Five fathoms!" again sung out the middy, and then, in a voice that had lost its drawl, he cried, as he again drew in the line:

"Less four fathoms!"

"Melville, we are shoaling at a fearful rate," exclaimed Captain Markham, anxiously.

"Three fathoms!" almost shrieked the mid-

shipman, and a feeling of anxiety seemed to possess all on board, except the calm form at the wheel, who said, quietly:

"Now heave the lead again, Ramsey, and you will find no use for your line."

Quickly the lead was spun far ahead, and all anxiously awaited the cry.

Soon it came in the same drawing tones first used by the young officer:

"No bottom!"

"Silence, men!" cried Paul, as both officers and men seemed about to break forth in a cheer of delight, and the minute after the sharp bows of the vessel swung round, under the guidance of her helm, and the *Sea Hawk* glided into a wide channel running through the two lofty arms of the cliff, in which up to that moment there had appeared no opening.

A few cables' length further on the channel widened into a basin, or harbor, and Paul Melville gave the order to lower the anchor softly into the water, while Captain Markham seized his hand, and said, frankly:

"Forgive me, Melville, but I believed a while since you had lost yourself; but you have proven a splendid pilot."

"Thank you, sir. Many of these islands in Southern waters have safe harbors, if you can find a way into them, and that is why the buccaneers find them such safe retreats, for they have sought them out, and learned the channels thoroughly that run into them. With the break of day, sir, I will land in the boats, and attack the pirate hamlet, which is just under yonder wooded hill."

"You shall lead, Melville, and Mabel and myself will follow in the gig to count the prisoners. Now, as it is two hours to day, let us go into the cabin and take an early breakfast," and Captain Markham led the way to the cabin, followed by his officers.

With the first glimmer of light, over the wooded hilltops, half a dozen boats, crowded with armed seamen, left the ship's side, and rowed, with muffled oars, toward the shore.

In the leading cutter was Paul Melville, and as the keel grated upon the white beach, he sprung ashore, followed by a score of stalwart seamen, who formed in line quickly as the other boats landed their human cargoes.

Astern, a cable's length, came the gig, containing Captain Markham and Mabel, and a crew of picked men as a reserve, while the guns of the *Sea Hawk* commanded the position, and could cover the retreat should the buccaneers prove too numerous and formidable, which was hardly expected to be the case.

"Ha! ha! ha!"

The shrill voice, unexpected wholly, and breaking forth in an almost demoniacal laughter, startled one and all, and caused many of the more superstitious seamen to believe that they had invaded the retreat of spooks.

"Ha! ha! ha!" again came the wild laughter, the sound coming from a point of land heavily wooded, and which Paul Melville had said overhung the rude hamlet of the corsairs.

"Who is it that laughs?" called out Paul Melville, striking up several muskets leveled toward the spot from whence came the sound.

Instantly there returned the shrill reply:

"One laughs who can afford to laugh at fools, who have come too late to find those whom they seek."

The voice was that of a woman; yet it might be some ruse to entrap them, and as daylight had not yet fully appeared for them to see distinctly at any distance, Paul Melville determined to enter into a parley with the speaker, whoever it might be, so he called out:

"You say that the buccaneers have gone from here?"

"Yes, days ago," replied the shrill voice.

"Whither have they gone?"

"Go ask the winds."

"Why did they go?"

"Because I warned them of approaching danger."

"You! how knew you of our coming?"

"I read the stars, man, and they read for me the faces of men; I read the past, and I know the future; I know all things, for the world is an open book to me," and the voice seemed full of pathos—its wildness and shrill tone had gone.

"If such is your power, you certainly do not fear man, so come from your retreat and face us," said Paul Melville.

There was a movement among the bushes, and the next instant a form came forth into the dim light of early morning, and with quick, firm tread, approached the spot where the crowd of seamen were gathered.

As the person drew nearer they saw that it was a woman—a tall, slender form, upright and wiry, and clad in a close-fitting robe of pure white, while adown her back, and reaching almost to the ground were heavy masses of the blackest hair.

Her face was that of a woman of perhaps fifty years of age, and the features had once been beautiful, but now were marked with grief, haggard, and stern-looking, while her eyes were wild and restless.

As she came near the crew, her arm outstretched, and finger pointing seaward, she said, sharply:

"Go; spread your sail and fly from here. Leave me to myself; those whom you seek have gone."

"Woman, do you tell the truth?"

It was Captain Markham who spoke, and the wild eyes were at once turned upon him, while she replied:

"You have men; search for yourself—ha! here is beauty—an angel among men," and she turned toward Mabel, who had just landed from the gig with her father.

"Poor woman! the world has been unkind to you," and Mabel took her thin, sunburnt hand. Instantly the woman started back, crying:

"Don't touch me! The pure must not touch the impure. Once I was pure, but that was long ago—years ago, and when I was young, as thou art; but now I am evil; my brain is on fire, and there is a hell in my heart that burns up my very life. Ha, ha, ha! Fools, go and seek the hunted buccaneer; go and see that I tell the truth, and leave me here with this maiden, that I may tell her of her future. Go—I say, go!"

The men moved not, and Captain Markham drew nearer to Mabel; but she said, fearlessly:

"Go, father, she will not harm me, and I believe she speaks the truth. Go, and let me hear what she has to say."

"It would be as well, sir. The buccaneers have gone, as I can see by their deserted cabins yonder; we are too late," said Paul Melville, and he moved off toward the hamlet up the glen, followed by the men, while Captain Markham, with another glance at the strange woman, walked rapidly on after his crew, leaving Mabel and her wild-looking companion together, for he did not dread danger to his daughter while he was so near to her.

CHAPTER IX.

A MYSTERY.

"GIRL, what brought you hither to this bated spot?"

Mabel started, for the woman spoke in an almost savage tone, so different from that in which she had before addressed her.

"I came hither with my father. He commands yonder vessel, and we are here to destroy the buccaneers," answered Mabel.

The woman laughed wildly, while she said, bitterly:

"Do you not know that the wicked thrive, that the good are the unfortunate? Why, the buccaneers who cruise these waters have their vessels filled with gold, and they revel in the mad fight on a ship's deck and fly the sea with little dread of the death that threatens them; in the wild storms their vessels ride safely, while those of honest men go down; here, on this isle, have deeds been committed that render it accursed, and yet from here free rovers have gone forth to victory, and wealth, while my own eyes have seen the merchant vessel hurled upon these shores by the mighty sea, and above its wreck ride the buccaneer. Ah! girl! you have come to an accursed spot."

"Why do you stay here? You certainly cannot love the life you have led here."

"No, but it is the only life I know now. Once I hated this spot, and cursed God because he allowed me to be brought here, a guilty thing; but that time is gone now, and here I must die," said the woman, sadly.

"No, no; you will go with us from here, and I will see that you are taken care of, and have a home in your old age," earnestly said Mabel.

"You would have me do that which I can never do. Here I must remain, and here I must die in sorrow; but, pity not me, girl, for your life will not always be what it now is—no, I read in your face traces of coming heart-anguish, and grief will yet bow thy proud sunny head, and bitter tears dim the brightness of thine eyes."

"It is given me, child, to read the human face, and from yours I read all that I have said; there is sorrow ahead of you."

"You certainly give me little hope for happiness," said Mabel, with a shudder she could not suppress.

"I can tell you more, girl. He whom you have hugged to your heart as the ideal of manhood, and, in spite of the name he bears, you will love, will yet cross your path, for he is not, as you believe, sleeping beneath the blue waves; oh, no; he lives, and you will meet again, and—shall I go on?"

"Go on; I am listening," said Mabel, in a husky voice, while from her face every atom of color had flown, leaving it white and cold.

"And, mark well my words: you will love him as one of your passionate nature only knows how to love, and that love will cheer him in the gloom that will come upon him. Maiden, again I tell you, there is sorrow before you. Ha-ha-ha! Did I not tell them they came too late—that I had warned the skimmers of the sea that the sea-hounds of justice were upon their wake, to track them to their isles?"

"Maiden, farewell, and forget not the words of one who reads the stars as she does an open book."

Waving her hand quickly, and ere Mabel could answer her, the woman retreated quickly and disappeared in the leafy covert of the hill-

side, just as Captain Markham came up, and asked:

"Where is your strange companion, daughter?"

"Gone, papa. She went to the hill yonder," replied Mabel, sadly.

"She was a strange creature, and I find she told the truth, for the island seems deserted, save by herself. Poor thing, she seemed crazed, and we must take her with us, and not leave her here to starve."

"I told her I would give her a home; but she bade me farewell and left."

"Then I must have her locked up and taken by force, for I cannot leave her here; she would die."

"Melville is now having the island thoroughly searched, and upon his return we will look up the woman, burn the pirate huts, and make sail. I hope that we will not find all the rendezvous deserted in this way."

"But, Mabel, by the way—what do you think of my new lieutenant?" and Captain Markham turned his eyes full upon his daughter's face, in which the color rapidly rose; but she replied with perfect self-possession:

"I like him, sir, and he has certainly proven himself a thorough seaman."

"He certainly has. None better ever handled a ship, and he has the nerve of a veteran. He is a rising officer, Mabel, and will not long remain under the command of others, although in years he is little more than a youth. Here he comes now."

As Captain Markham spoke, Paul Melville came in sight, and reported to his commander that the island was certainly deserted by the buccaneers, and the indications were that they had left hastily.

"Well, we will now steer for the next rendezvous, so the men might as well return on board. No, let us first find that crazy old woman, who, after talking for some time to Mabel bade her farewell and departed, refusing to go with us."

"Very well, sir: I will look her up."

"After you have found her bring her on board, whether she cares to come or not, and then set fire to the cabins and we will get out of this."

Paul Melville turned away to obey the bidding of his commander, who, with Mabel, after a short stroll about the pirate village, returned to the Sea Hawk.

An hour after Paul Melville sent word on board that the woman could nowhere be found, and asked if one cabin had not better be left as a shelter to her, and provisions also?

"No, if she is so stubborn, I see no reason why we should aid her. She got along well enough before we came, let her do the same after we leave," angrily said Captain Melville, to the young midshipman who brought the message.

"Father, the poor crazy creature was doubtless deserted by the buccaneers, and left to starve; let us not be as cruel—"

"Let this island be again thoroughly searched, and then, if we cannot find her, we can go with a better heart, and can leave food for her, and a cabin for her to find shelter in," and Mabel spoke with some indignation in her tones.

Captain Markham at once yielded, and sent the midshipman back with the remark:

"Tell Lieutenant Melville to again thoroughly search the island, and then, if the woman cannot be found, to leave the best cabin standing, and place in it what provisions he considers best. Stay; I will again return to the shore. Come, Mabel, we will take a good look over this pirate isle."

Mabel was glad to get the chance to go, and ten minutes afterward the father and daughter, accompanied by Lieutenant Melville and the midshipman, Fred Ramsey, were walking together over the really beautiful island, while a hundred seamen were scouring the woods and glens for the missing woman, who had so strangely appeared before them and so mysteriously disappeared.

"Let us gain yonder height; it will give us a fine view of the island," said Mabel, pointing to a wooded cliff, some distance away.

"I fear you will find it rough climbing, Miss Markham," said Paul Melville, while her father added:

"Yes, Mabel, it is too hard work to go there."

"Oh, if you and Lieutenant Melville are unwilling to go, Mr. Ramsey, I know, will accompany me," and Mabel glanced at the susceptible midshipman, who doffed his hat, and said he was only too willing.

"We will all go then; a woman will have her way, Melville," declared the captain, laughing.

Paul Melville made no reply, and the quartette set off for the cliff, which after a hard climb was reached.

"Now you can look at your view; I am too tired to move," and Captain Markham threw himself down to rest, while Fred Ramsey took paper and pencil out of his pocket and at once began to sketch the really magnificent scene, for the island lay before them, with its ravines, valleys and basin-like harbor, with the expansive sea upon every side, undotted by a single sail.

Paul Melville stood in silence, his arms folded

across his breast, and in deep reverie, while Mabel bounded away to the shelter of an old tree some thirty paces distant.

Paul Melville followed her with his eyes, and saw her reach the tree, glance downward, and then give a start, and appear as though about to run back and join them.

But, as if changing her mind upon second thought, she stood her ground, and called out: "Lieutenant Melville, please come here."

Paul Melville walked quickly toward her, and as he drew near he saw that her face was flushed with excitement, and her eyes shone with increased brightness.

"How can I serve you, Miss Markham?"

Mabel Markham made no reply, but silently pointed downward with her finger, while she kept her eyes upon the lieutenant.

The two stood upon the very point of the cliff, and upon which grew a single tree, beaten and scarred by many a storm, and approached by a rugged, dangerous path, from which a false step might hurl them to death, five hundred feet below upon the rocks, washed by the sea upon the opposite side of the island from where the Sea Hawk lay at anchor.

"You are venturesome, Miss Markham; you endanger your life in coming here," said Paul, reprovingly.

"Is the result not worth the risk?" asked the maiden, and then she continued: "Come closer to me, and look yonder."

The young man obeyed, and his face changed color, as his eyes fell upon the scene below—a rugged beach, still water to the leeward of the island, and a vessel lying quietly at anchor close in shore, while, upon the shore, and close in under the cliff, were a number of men, evidently the crew of the craft at anchor.

But one object particularly seemed to attract the maiden's eye—the form of a woman in white—the same crazed being who had prophesied for her such a life of sorrow.

"Well, the mystery is solved; yonder are those whom you seek," said Mabel, with some little triumph in her tones.

For one instant Paul Melville made no reply; but then he said:

"Do you recognize that vessel, Miss Markham?"

Before, Mabel had merely glanced at the craft at anchor; now she gazed at it intently, and her face turned deadly pale, as she exclaimed:

"It looks like the schooner of Rafael the Rover."

"Miss Markham, it is the Curse of the Sea," impressively returned Paul Melville.

CHAPTER X.

THE WARNING.

At the words of Paul Melville, Mabel again bent her earnest gaze upon the schooner, so quietly laying at anchor far below them, and then said:

"You are convinced of what you say, Lieutenant Melville, that that schooner is the Curse of the Sea?"

"I am."

"There can be no mistake?" persisted Mabel.

"None; I knew the vessel well; when I was a captive I saw her many times."

"Yet I saw the Curse of the Sea sunk by the broadsides of the Cornet and Sea Hawk."

"You doubtless supposed so; but yonder lies the vessel in full view, and we must at once put the Sea Hawk upon her."

Mabel started, and her face flushed and paled as she said:

"If you take the schooner you will hang Rafael?"

"Assuredly; such is the fate of the pirate."

"Would no mercy be shown him?" asked the maiden, still more anxiously.

"Why should he expect it? Is he not known the world over as a corsair, and has his name not been connected with the vilest deeds?"

"True; yet there is an old saying that his Satanic majesty is not as black as he is painted, and I think that it is the same with Rafael—in fact I have proof that he has a noble heart, and I am glad that he did not die as was supposed."

"You prefer then that he should live to be hung?" remarked Paul Melville, in a tone of surprise.

"For shame, sir—did I not tell you that he rendered me a service I shall never forget? but," and Mabel hesitated, while her face crimsoned, "Lieutenant Melville, will your sense of duty compel you to make known the existence of the schooner to the leeward of this island?"

"Certainly; why should I not?" asked the young officer, in surprise.

"Suppose I ask you to do me a favor, would you grant it?"

"In what can I serve you, Miss Markham?"

"I will be frank with you, sir. Rafael's kindness to me I shall never forget; and now, were it not that I had foolishly insisted upon coming up here, the Sea Hawk would have sailed without discovering that the pirates had not really evacuated the island, but removed to a spot accessible to only themselves, who know the secret paths leading there, and by which yonder woman must have gone; now, as I discovered

the buccaneers, it will be through me that they will be taken—"

"They are not yet taken, Miss Markham, and, as you have had cause to know, Rafael is not easily subdued, and may yet escape us."

"True, and yet he may be captured, and if he is, I will feel that his blood is upon my hands, and I beg you, Lieutenant Melville, to grant my favor."

"Name it, Miss Markham."

"If I had not thoughtlessly called you here, you would still be in ignorance of the presence of the buccaneers; so I beg you to return with me, rejoin my father and Mr. Ramsey, and make no mention of the discovery."

Paul Melville gazed full into the face of the maiden, who met his eye fearlessly, and then said, in a tone in which there was considerable emotion:

"Would you have me be recreant to my duty, Miss Markham?"

Mabel promptly replied by asking another question:

"Would you have me censure myself to my dying day for bringing yonder men to a death at the yard-arm?"

"They are buccaneers, Miss Markham."

"They are human beings, sir."

Paul Melville made no reply; there was evidently some strong emotion moving him, and he remained silent, and Mabel continued:

"Would you have me feel that I did wrong in placing confidence in you?"

"No; and yet duty compels me to report to my commander that Rafael, the Rover, is within a mile of him at this present moment," firmly replied the officer, and seeing that the maiden seemed really much moved by his words, he continued:

"And you certainly should not feel that you were instrumental in bringing these men to their death if we capture them."

"I do feel it; but if he were not there, I would not feel that I was doing wrong; but I see that you are determined to refuse my request."

"I know not how I can do otherwise."

The lieutenant seemed strangely moved, and the maiden wore an anxious expression upon her face, as the two stood momentarily in silence.

Then a light, as if of some sudden bright thought crossed Mabel's face, and she said, quickly:

"Will you let me see the pistol you wear in your belt, lieutenant?"

Without a word he removed the weapon and handed it to her.

"It is a handsome arm; I have noticed it several times. I wonder if I could bring down yonder sea-bird, sailing so gracefully there? I will try."

Before Paul Melville could reply, the pistol was cocked, leveled and fired.

The sea-bird, with a startled shriek, flew swiftly away out of harm's way, while the crack of the pistol echoed and re-echoed against the rocks, and in the crevices, like the rattle of a thousand muskets.

"Miss Markham, what have you done? See; the buccaneers are alarmed!" cried Paul Melville, as he saw that the report had reached the group of pirates on the beach, who instantly saw from whence had come the shot.

"I know it; I fired to place them on their guard," coolly returned Mabel, and as her father and Fred Ramsey came quickly toward them, she called out:

"See, papa; I can cry Eureka! Yonder are the buccaneers."

Captain Markham ran to the spot, beheld the schooner, and the crowd on shore, and cried:

"By Jove! you are right, Mabel. You have indeed found them; but why did you fire that shot?"

"I fired at a sea-bird, papa, but I missed the bird. Will you go down and attack the buccaneers?" innocently asked the maiden.

"It is impossible from here, is it not, Melville?"

"Yes, sir. We can only put to sea at once, round the island and endeavor to head off the schooner, and send boats in to attack those on shore."

"If they do not embark on the schooner," said the captain.

"Which they are doing now," Fred Ramsey announced.

"You are right: the schooner is sending a boat ashore for them, and there goes one already, crowded, just shoving off from the beach. Run, Ramsey, and get the men on board the Sea Hawk! We will follow as quickly as we can. Have the signal-gun fired, if the crew are not near the landing, for we must put to sea at once. Come, Mabel, let us return."

The midshipman bounded away, and the others followed, the maiden having a look upon her face which Paul Melville could not fail to read; it was a look of quiet triumph. If Rafael the Rover was taken, she had at least done what she could to warn him of his danger.

CHAPTER XI.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

AN hour after the discovery of the buccaneers, hiding away beneath the southern

cliffs of the island, the Sea Hawk was again going through the narrow channel, out into the open sea—Paul Melville, as before, at the helm, and Captain Markham and Mabel standing near him, and watching the skill and nerve with which he ran the dangerous gantlet between the rocks.

"As the wind is from the westward, Captain Markham, we will go to the westward of the island, and this will bring us to the windward of the buccaneer," said Paul Melville, as the Sea Hawk gained an offing.

"You are right, Melville. You allow no advantage to escape you," replied Captain Markham.

"Of course we will have to take the chances of his keeping around the island on the other side."

"Yes; but now that we have him within three leagues of us, we must not allow him to escape. You say that you recognized the schooner as that of the Curse of the Sea?"

"Yes, sir; I know his vessel well."

"Then after all he escaped us that night. How he did, his patron, the devil, only knows, for he received, at less than half a mile, an iron hail of over forty guns; but I remember, now, that the storm came up while we were looking to see if we could find trace of him, and in the mist and darkness he scudded away, leaving us to rejoice over the thought that he had gone to the bottom."

Paul Melville made no reply, but having directed the helmsman how to steer, he walked forward on some duty, leaving Mabel and her father watching the shores of the island that opened before them bold and rugged, the one with dread of coming evil, the other with the hope that the Curse of the Sea would soon be in reach of his guns.

"Mabel, do you know I think I must have somewhere met Melville before? There is something strangely familiar in his face to me."

"And to me, papa; but it may be only a fancied resemblance, yet I feel as though I had known him, years ago."

"Captain Markham, I will call the men to quarters, for when we round yonder point, we will obtain a view of the lee of the island, and if the schooner has not cleared out, we can soon be in range," and Paul Melville again joined the group on the quarter-deck.

"Very well, lieutenant; let the men go to their guns."

Paul Melville at once gave the order for the men to go quietly to quarters, not caring to alarm the schooner, if still beyond the point, by the roll of the drum.

Then every one anxiously awaited the moment when the Sea Hawk should round the point, and considerable anxiety was expressed on the faces of the men, who feared that the shrewd buccaneer might escape them.

A few moments more and the sloop-of-war swept around the rugged cliff, and a murmur of disappointment arose upon all sides; the buccaneer was gone!

"How close can you run in, Lieutenant Melville?"

"Close in shore at this point, sir. Do you wish to land?"

"Yes, I will send two boats ashore to reconnoiter, and see if some of the rascals are not skulking around the rocks. It will only delay us half an hour."

"Not longer, sir. Mr. Edmunds, call away the first and second cutters, and man them with a score of men each," and Paul Melville turned to Bancroft Edmunds, the lieutenant next in command to himself, and a dashing, handsome, noble-hearted fellow, of courtly manners, and a thorough sailor withal.

"Shall I go with the boats, sir?"

"Yes, if you desire it."

Coming up into the wind the Sea Hawk's boats were lowered, and at once rowed shoreward.

"Edmunds, ahoy!" suddenly called out Captain Markham, ere the boats had gone a cable's length.

"Ay, ay, sir!" came back in the clear tones of the young officer.

"We will put about, and stand back the way we came and return for you ere dark. Should you hear firing, come off in your boats and join us."

"Ay, ay, sir!" and the boats continued on their way.

"Melville, the idea has just struck me that the schooner is playing hide and seek with us, and if we go back the way we came we will meet him; then if he runs around the island and Edmunds sees him he will board and carry him with the cutlass, for under the lee of the land, here, the boats can overhaul the buccaneer, and he will not suspect the presence of an enemy from the land."

"A good idea, Captain Markham. I will at once put the vessel on her course back the way we came," and under a seven-knot breeze the Sea Hawk sailed away, encircling the island, and making good headway, for she was a fast sailer, and thorough sea-boat.

A run of two hours brought them again opposite the entrance of the little harbor, and yet the schooner was nowhere visible.

"Could the daring fellow have run into the harbor, not expecting us to re-enter it?" asked Captain Markham.

"I think not, sir; he must still be under the lee of the island," replied Paul Melville.

"Then we will continue on as we are, and make the circuit of the island. We can get back to where we left Edmunds within three hours, and if the buccaneers discover us they will run right upon the boats and we will have them between two fires, for Edmunds is a dashing fellow, and would give an arm to take the schooner without the aid of the sloop."

Past the entrance of the land-locked basin sailed the sloop-of-war, the men still at the guns, and all anxiously watching for the object of their search, as the rocky shores opened to their view; but after more than two hours' sailing the Sea Hawk came up the spot where the boats had gone ashore, and still no sight of the buccaneer craft.

"That is strange. The fellow could not have passed, or Edmunds certainly would have attacked him. Where can he have gone, Mr. Melville?" said Captain Markham, in surprise.

"It is hard to tell, sir; but the men are signaling us from the shore."

"You are right; what is that they say?"

Paul Melville turned his glass upon the crowd on the beach, and his face slightly changed color, as he replied:

"It is Midshipman Ramsey who signals, and he says that they have lost Lieutenant Edmunds."

"Lost him! In God's name what can he mean?" cried Captain Markham, in angry surprise.

"I will signal him to repeat, sir, and you can read for yourself what he says," and seizing the signal halyards, Paul Melville hastily set the signal:

"Repeat what you said!"

"We have lost Lieutenant Edmunds!" again came the signal from the shore.

"This is a bad business, Melville. We will stand close in and you can go ashore and see what it means."

The Sea Hawk was immediately headed in shore, and in half an hour more Paul Melville stood on the beach, where he was met by Fred Ramsey, looking pale and troubled.

"Well, sir, what is the meaning of your strange signal?"

"It means that we came ashore and searched the rocks, and finding no means of access to the cliffs above, or a place where the buccaneers could conceal themselves, we returned to the beach, all excepting Lieutenant Edmunds, whom we left standing on yonder rock."

"While patiently awaiting the return of the Sea Hawk, we suddenly saw the buccaneer round yonder point, under easy sail, and, as he was not half a mile away, I called to Lieutenant Edmunds, thinking he would go out and board him."

"No reply came, and while I got the men in the boats, I sent two seamen to look him up; but they returned and reported that they could not find him, and I ran myself, accompanied by half a dozen men to look him up, but with the same result."

"In the meantime the schooner had come abreast of us, and we could see her men at the guns; and, expecting that they would fire upon us, I ordered the men to seek cover behind the rocks, while I again searched for the lieutenant."

"An exclamation from the men caused me to again glance toward the schooner, and to my surprise I saw the black flag run up to the peak, and then it was dipped three times as though in salute to us, yet perhaps it was a signal to some one on shore."

"The schooner then passed out of sight around yonder rocky point, and shortly after the Sea Hawk came in sight, and I signaled the loss of Lieutenant Edmunds."

Paul Melville listened without interruption to the midshipman's story, and then said, with a troubled air:

"Strange what could have become of him; but, we must act at once, and I wish you to return in the gig and make your report to Captain Markham, while I take the men and again thoroughly search those rocks. He could not have fallen into the sea, think you?"

"There are several places where he might have slipped and fallen, sir, and as the sea is deep beneath, such might have been the case."

"Very well; tell Captain Markham I will search as long as I see there is any hope of finding a trace of poor Edmunds, and then return on board."

"Ay, ay, sir," and the midshipman departed for the vessel, while Paul Melville, and every man with him, began the search again for the officer who had so mysteriously disappeared.

CHAPTER XII.

CHASING A CORSAIR.

Most diligently did Paul Melville and his men search every crack and hole on the shore and in the rocks, even looking into places where a bird could not have found shelter; but all to no purpose; the missing lieutenant could nowhere be found, and with heavy hearts the

party set out for the Sea Hawk, just as darkness began to settle upon the waters.

Their lack of success was known ere they reached the vessel, for every eye had anxiously watched the search, and a gloom rested upon all, for the young officer was most popular with all on board.

"It is useless to ask the result?" said Captain Markham, meeting the lieutenant at the gangway.

"Yes, sir; he could nowhere be found. From the shore it seems impossible to reach the cliffs, or interior of the island, and how he can have disappeared we can find no trace, unless—"

"Unless what?" asked Captain Markham, as the officer paused.

"Unless he slipped and fell into the sea, and, stunned by the fall, was unable to save himself by swimming."

"That must have been his fate. Poor Edmunds! Well, we must avenge him when we catch the schooner. What would you advise, Melville?"

"To continue on after the schooner. We know that she is simply keeping the island between us."

"Yes, and cannot do that long—see there!" and Captain Markham pointed to the westward, where a bank of heavy clouds was rapidly rising.

"That storm will drive him away from the land, sir."

"Yes, and us, too. The schooner will doubtless keep to leeward of the island until the storm strikes, and we must do the same. Once in sight of him we can keep near him until the gale blows over and then he is our game. I wish poor Edmunds was here; I do not like leaving the island until I am assured of his fate," sadly said Captain Markham.

"Do you not think he could have been kidnapped?" suddenly asked Mabel.

"Kidnapped! Nonsense, child; who was there to kidnap him?"

"Buccaneers, papa."

"Foolish child; did not Lieutenant Melville tell us that he could find no trace of a path communicating with the interior of the island, and that to scale the cliffs was impossible?"

"True, and yet, when first discovered upon the beach, from yonder cliff, both Lieutenant Melville and myself distinctly saw among the buccaneers the very woman who met us this morning."

"You are right; there must be some secret way leading into the island, or how did she get down upon the shore?" exclaimed Captain Markham. "By Jove! it takes a woman to ferret out a secret."

"Miss Markham is certainly correct, sir, and it remains for you to decide whether we shall return to an anchorage in the basin, and tomorrow make a thorough search in full force, or give up the lieutenant as lost, and go on in pursuit of the buccaneer," said Paul Melville.

"Well, what do you say, Melville?"

"I would prefer that you decide, sir, or—"

"Or what?"

"Ask Miss Markham's advice, and call a council of your officers."

"I will do it; but what say you, Mabel?"

"I think that, as at any time Mr. Edmunds could not have been more than a hundred yards from his men, and was known to have been a brave man, he could not have been taken without a struggle, and hence I fear he met his death, as Lieutenant Melville suggested, by falling from the rocks into the sea."

"You are right, doubtless; now I will see what my officers have to say," and after conversation with them, Captain Markham decided to go on in pursuit of the buccaneer, for all decided that Bancroft Edmunds was not the man to allow himself to be taken quietly, and had there been a struggle it would certainly have been heard by some of the men, for, when last seen, the young officer was not a hundred yards from the boats.

The Sea Hawk was then put away for the lee of the island, returning the way she had come.

Reaching a position, where she could safely ride out the storm, if the wind did not shift round, the vessel was stripped of canvas, housed her topmasts, and lay to on the dark waters, just as the howling winds swept over her, bearing with them sand, leaves and twigs from the island, across which it rushed with tremendous fury.

For several hours the gale continued with great violence, and the crew of the Sea Hawk had all they could do to look after the safety of their vessel, without watching for the buccaneer schooner, for the waves washed heavily over the decks, and every officer and man stood at his post, while Mabel remained in the cabin, quite nervous as she felt the pitching and rolling of the ship.

"Sail, ho!"

Had a spirit from the clouds hailed, it could not have startled the crew more than did the deep voice of Paul Melville, rising above the roar of the storm, while he sprang forward, seized a battle lantern and waved it rapidly in circles above his head.

Every eye was strained to the utmost, peering out over the wild waters, in the direction in

which looked Paul Melville, and indistinctly in the gloom was traceable the tall masts, and close-reefed sails of a schooner bearing directly down upon the sloop of war, and not very far distant.

Yet, as they looked, the helmsman on the schooner seemed to discover the circling light of the lantern, for suddenly the bows swept round, and directly before the gale the craft dashed away like a frightened deer.

"The buccaneer! The buccaneer!" arose upon all sides, and quickly Captain Markham called out:

"He like to have run us down, Melville, and your presence of mind in waving the lantern saved us; but we must not let him escape. Get under way and we will give chase, in spite of the gale."

Paul Melville made no reply, but sternly gave the requisite orders, and off dashed the Sea Hawk in pursuit of her prey.

But the schooner had already disappeared in the gloom, and the sea was so rough that Captain Markham determined to again lay to, when almost in their wake was discovered the buccaneer craft, standing back toward the shelter of the land.

Instantly the Sea Hawk was put about, and now, with the schooner in view, for a hundred eyes were upon it, the vessel-of-war rushed rapidly landward in chase.

Nearer and nearer the two vessels drew, until the rocky cliffs arose threateningly in their front; but still the buccaneer schooner stood fearlessly on, and the Sea Hawk as boldly pursued.

"This is deuced dangerous work, Melville," said Captain Markham to his young lieutenant, who stood by his side, his eyes constantly peering into the darkness ahead.

"It is indeed, sir," quietly responded the officer.

"Would you advise the continuance of the pursuit nearer land?"

"Just as you desire, sir; the schooner still stands on."

"Yes; but I do not like this running upon the land."

"Shall I give the order to stand seaward again, sir?"

"No, at least not yet. By Heaven! Melville, the gale is sweeping around," cried Captain Markham, anxiously.

"It is, indeed, sir; in fifteen minutes we shall lie upon a lee shore," calmly responded Paul Melville, and ere Captain Markham could reply, the wind suddenly came to a lull, a momentary calm followed, then fitful gusts, and then, with the rush of a tornado, it came from dead astern, burying the bows of the vessel deep in the waves.

"Stand ready all to wear ship!" rung out the voice of Paul Melville, as the vessel rolled and pitched in the mad waters, and a voice from forward cried, in startling tones:

"The schooner has gone down!"

At once all was confusion on board the Sea Hawk, and in the midst of the excitement a dozen voices rose with the wild cry:

"Breakers ahead! breakers ahead!"

"Silence! To your posts all! Stand ready all!"

The ringing tones of Paul Melville rose above the roar of wind and water, and the startled cries of the crew, and springing to the helm, he continued:

"Do your duty, men, and there is no danger!"

Immediately the coolness of their young officer, his calm tones and dauntless manner reassured the crew, and springing to their posts they awaited the next command.

It would have come sooner, but the eyes of Paul Melville fell upon Mabel Markham, who had rushed from the cabin, and stood clinging to her father, who was in vain striving to force her below.

This sight momentarily checked his order to the crew: but seeing that Mabel was in no immediate danger, the deep voice shouted forth the commands, and the willing officers and men promptly obeyed; but, to the horror of all, the ship could not be brought round, and the gale was driving her with the speed of a race-horse upon the island.

Again consternation seemed to seize upon the crew, and again the voice of Paul Melville commanded order and silence, while he shouted to Captain Markham:

"There is but one chance, sir—to run into the basin in the island."

"It will be impossible in such a night," shouted back Captain Markham.

"It can be done, sir," and Paul Melville again bent his gaze intently ahead.

But the gloom was impenetrable, and he set his teeth hard. If he could not get his bearings he knew that they must go to their doom.

Suddenly a bright flash burst forth, dead ahead, and all, by the momentary light, beheld the buccaneer schooner laying to, and not half a mile away.

Then, again came a second flash, and a third, and the last displayed the close-reefed sails set on the schooner, and once more all was darkness, but only for a moment, for from the cliff top blazed up a bright flame, before which was a human form.

"The old witch!" burst from a dozen throats, as the old woman of the isle was recognized by the bright light, and the sailors believed they were being lured on to death.

"Hold! Do you not see that that beacon has saved us?"

It was Paul Melville that spoke, and with perfect confidence he headed the vessel for the light on the cliff, which now blazed up in huge red flames, liberally fed by fagots thrown on by the weird woman, who, with her long hair streaming in the gale, and her white dress, looked like a very spirit of the storm.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SPECTER OF THE CLIFF.

"MELVILLE, that beacon was lit at the signal gun of the schooner."

"Yes, Captain Markham; the commander of the schooner realizes his danger, and would run in; it is too dark for him to get bearings and he signaled to have the beacon lighted."

"Then the island is still inhabited?"

"It would seem so. It was the woman who lit the beacon. See, you can distinctly behold her form."

"Yes, and I am thankful to her, for the beacon guides you as well as the schooner."

"Equally as well, sir. There is nothing to fear now. See, the buccaneer vessel—there, just off the starboard bow—he is reefed down, and is running directly for the channel through the cliff. It is plain sailing now."

Captain Markham certainly did not think that it looked like plain sailing; but after what he had seen Paul Melville do, he had full confidence in him, and drawing Mabel closer to him, stood awaiting the dread ordeal.

The two vessels were now driving with frightful velocity toward the island, not a mile away, and directly before the gale, the buccaneer being only a few cables' length ahead, and drenched by the mad waters through which it plunged.

Upon the little craft every eye was turned with admiration, for they could but admire the splendid manner in which the schooner was handled; but the superstitions of the crew of the Sea Hawk settled in their minds that they were but following a shadow vessel to their ruin.

And certainly the surroundings were such as to carry them out in their supposition, for only a short time before they had seen, or thought they did, that very schooner go down to the bottom of the sea, under a terrific broadside from the Sea Hawk and the frigate; after which they visited the pirate isle only to find it deserted, save by a witch-like-looking woman, who was now on the cliff above them, luring them with a lurid beacon on to ruin, while before them sped the strange schooner, as though unmindful of the savage gale.

Then, had not Lieutenant Edmunds mysteriously disappeared from their very midst? and was not the blackness around them almost tangible, while the sloop, after having in vain tried to beat away from the land, was rushing madly in the wild waters, dashing upon a rocky isle, that, in pleasant weather, presented a most inhospitable shore?

The cool courage of Paul Melville at the wheel alone held control of the crew. Had he shown a lack of nerve, demoralization would have quickly followed upon all sides; but, with the mien of one who held no dread, he kept his place, and headed the bows of the Sea Hawk directly along the glittering stream of light that poured from the cliff-top over the foam-lashed waters.

"The schooner has gone down!" cried a chorus of voices, as once again the little vessel disappeared suddenly from sight, and just at a point where a wall of foam arose over a sunken reef.

Every eye peered anxiously into the darkness, and every ear was strained to catch the shrieks of the drowning crew arising above the howling storm.

But no eye could catch sight of the raking masts, and no ear could hear a cry from the waters, and then the crew turned once more toward their fearless helmsman.

He had not appeared to notice the cry about the schooner, and his hand, if he did so, never quivered upon the wheel-spoke; but with the same cool courage he held the Sea Hawk on her course, until the bows passed through the outer edge of the wall of foam, and then were in darkness beneath the shadow of the cliff, for no longer did the beacon from the hill-top shed its glare upon the deck.

Then arose, above the shrieking winds and roaring waters, the deep tones of Paul Melville giving quick orders to the crew, and nimbly the men obeyed, when the Sea Hawk shot into the channel opening in the cliff, and two minutes after was in the island basin, where the force of the gale was broken, and only fitful gusts swept down upon the unusually placid harborage.

Standing directly across the basin, Paul Melville gave orders to let fall the anchor, and with one accord the crew burst forth in one wild hurrah. They had reached a haven of safety, and immediate destruction no longer stared them in the face.

And yet a superstitious dread still rested upon the crew, who would not believe that the buccaneer craft was not the phantom of the one that had gone down at sea beneath the iron storm of two broadsides.

"Well, Melville, you are certainly the finest sailor, and have the most nerve of any man I ever met before."

"Thank you, captain," modestly replied Paul Melville, as he released the wheel, and took the proffered hand of his commander, while Mabel said, earnestly:

"Yes, Lieutenant Melville, we all owe you our lives; but do you think the buccaneer really went down? I was watching it when he suddenly disappeared, as though he had struck upon a reef, and gone to pieces in the twinkling of an eye," said Mabel.

"It is hard to tell, Miss Markham. These buccaneers are thorough seamen, and yet he was in a most dangerous situation to attempt any freaks with fate," calmly replied the lieutenant.

"Well, if he did not go down he came on into this basin, and I shall soon know if he is here. Mr. Ramsey, burn several blue lights," and at the order of Captain Markham the midshipman soon set fire to several blue lights, and a wild, weird light was cast over the waters, penetrating to the furthest recesses of the basin.

"The schooner is nowhere visible; did any one catch sight of the schooner?" cried the captain.

No answer came, and Captain Markham said:

"The fellow is at last under water. Now we can rest, at least for the night, and in the morning I will have every foot of this island searched, and the hiding-place of that old witch shall be discovered. Now, Mabel, we will retire to the cabin," and father and daughter left the deck, followed soon after by Paul Melville, who gave orders that he should be called at the first break of day.

Shortly after the disappearance of Paul Melville from the deck, a muffled form came cautiously up from the forecabin and glanced around him.

The seamen, except the watch, had all retired to rest, and those on duty, broken down by a hard day's work, were indolently leaning, half asleep, against the bulwarks or guns, while the officer of the deck, his back against the wheel, idly puffed at a cigar.

Reaching the bows of the vessel the muffled form threw himself along the bowsprit, as though to keep watch on the shore; but, slowly he slipped from sight, and catching hold of the cable, slid softly down into the water and disappeared beneath the surface.

An hour and more passed, and then from shoreward a dark object upon the water slowly approached the vessel, and nimbly, yet silently, it assumed the form of a man as it drew itself up by the cable, and once more reached the bows, from which it cautiously approached the forecabin, the watch, as before, half asleep.

Shortly after he had gone from sight the first peep of light came over the cliff tops, and rousing himself to action the officer of the deck called to a seaman to awaken Lieutenant Melville.

Five minutes after that officer was on deck, and at once the vessel became a busy scene; boats were lowered, crews armed, and the expedition for the shore was ready—Paul Melville, as before, being in command.

The sun arose as the boats left the ship's side, and the island lay brightly beautiful before them; but, without, the gale still blew, though with less violence, and the roar of the breakers was like peals of thunder, as they struck against the reefs with herculean force.

Landing his crew Paul Melville set them to work on the search of the island, dividing them into thirty different parties, of three men each, and ordering them to leave no nook or bush unsearched, and to report to him there if they made any discoveries of importance.

Returning to the vessel to breakfast, Paul found Mabel up and dressed, saying she intended to aid in the search of the island, for if there was a mystery to solve, and mystery there certainly was, her woman's curiosity should aid in its solution.

To this decision her father made no other objection than that she should not at any time be alone while on the island, for he feared she might disappear as had poor Bancroft Edmunds.

Thus, through the whole day, the search was continued, and with no result, for no buccaneers were found, and even the "old witch," as the sailors would call the solitary sojourner of the isle, had taken herself to some hiding-place where it was impossible to discover her.

During the day the gale had blown itself out, the sea had run down, and just at sunset Captain Markham ordered up the anchor, and the Sea Hawk again stood seaward, Paul Melville once more at the helm.

As the vessel passed, out through the rocky walls a voice suddenly hailed, as though from the clouds:

"Sea Hawk, ahoy!"

All eyes turned upward at once, and, standing on the verge of the cliff, her right hand extended and pointing seaward, while in her

white robe and long hair, looking like a specter, was the woman who had greeted them upon their first landing with demoniacal laughter, and the night before had lighted the beacon that had led them to safety.

"Curse that woman! She seems like our evil spirit," vehemently exclaimed Captain Markham.

"Say rather like our protecting spirit, papa, for she certainly rendered us great service last night."

"But, Mabel, that beacon was intended for the schooner, not us."

"And yet it lured the schooner to ruin and us to safety. But hark! she is speaking."

"Ha-ha-ha! Would you hunt the hated buccaneer, seek him yonder upon the sea. Behold!"

All eyes turned in the direction in which she pointed, and there beheld, not a league away, sailing along under easy canvas, the buccaneer schooner, the *Curse of the Coast*.

A wild cry burst from the crew—half of fury, half of dread, and they again turned their eyes up toward the cliff; but the woman had gone.

Again every eye was bent upon the schooner, and suddenly clouds of white canvas covered it from deck to truck, and like a huge white bird the fleet vessel darted away.

"All hands to make sail! Crowd on every stitch she will bear!" cried Captain Markham, with energy, and five minutes after the *Sea Hawk* was flying rapidly on after her prey that had so often eluded being caught in her talons.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MORTAL STROKE.

"Now that we have that fellow in view, Captain Markham, we must keep him there, and with your permission I will devote myself to holding him in sight."

The speaker was an officer of thirty-five, and one who had seen sea-service ever since his earliest boyhood.

Next in command to Lieutenant Edmunds, he now stood in that officer's berth, and was a man in whom all on board had considerable confidence as regarded his ability, but whose love of liquor had prevented him from rising as rapidly up the scale of promotion as his merits deserved.

"Very well, Mr. Redmond, you can keep your eye on the buccaneer, but in this starlight night, it will be hard for him to dodge us—don't you think so, Melville?"

"They are slippery customers, sir, and up to all kinds of tricks," quietly responded Paul Melville, who was conversing with Mabel.

"I guess they are up to all sorts of tricks, as you say, sir," continued Lieutenant Redmond. "Why, when pursued at night, they will unexpectedly lower their whole top-hammer, yards, spars, and we might dash by them a few cables' length away and not see them."

"Now, see that fellow; he looks like a phantom, and the men think he is one, and I don't much blame the lads. Well, suppose he should, like a flash, while we momentarily lost sight of him, lower away his main and foresails, and furl his topsails, it would, with his low, dark hull, leave us only two slender sticks to find him by, and the best glass could not detect them on such a hight as this."

"Why, some years ago, I was cruising in these very waters, in the *Swamp Fox*, when we sighted a little fore-and-aft schooner, two leagues away, and knowing it to be one of the buccaneer craft that infested this latitude, we at once gave chase."

"Finding we were after him, he scampered away, wing-and-wing before the wind, the best point of sailing for these craft. Well, we slowly gained on the little scamp, and he hauled his wind, and went off due west with a free sheet, with the wind on his starboard, and this compelled us to stand across to meet him, and we had to do our best, for the little devil sailed like a witch."

"But we set studding-sails forward, and fore and main gaff-topsails, and we gained on the scamp until we could see his men upon the deck, quite distinctly."

"Well, all of a sudden the fellow disappeared, and in spite of our searching the sea, we could not find him, and we began to believe he had gone down, preferring death by drowning to being hung at the yard-arm."

"So we gave the fellow up, after cruising about some time in fruitless search of him, and we believed him certainly foundered, and stood again on our course, to, the next morning, run plump upon him, just at daybreak, lying to, with all sails furled."

"It was too late for him to run then, and we captured the little fellow, hung his commander, a burly Spaniard, and gave up the crew to the authorities at Havana: so you see it is not necessary, Captain Markham, to keep a close watch on—"

"The schooner is not in sight, sir."

The shrill voice of Midshipman Ramsey startled all who heard it, and every eye at once scanned the waters for the missing craft.

"I had my eye on her a minute ago, and now she has gone," explained Fred Ramsey.

"How did she bear, Mr. Ramsey?" asked Captain Markham.

"Two points to windward, sir, when I last saw her."

"Bring the helm up two points, quarter-master, and hold that course," ordered Captain Markham, evidently annoyed at the disappearance of the schooner, and turning to Lieutenant Redmond, he continued with sarcasm:

"You assumed your duty too late, sir. Had you used your eyes half as well as you did your tongue, the buccaneer would have still been in sight."

"I told you so, sir; these fellows are tricky," said the lieutenant, crestfallen at the rebuke given him, yet triumphant that his words had proven true.

"The schooner is evidently in the locality, sir," said Paul Melville, leaving the side of Mabel, and joining Captain Markham.

"He must be; he has not gone down, I'll warrant. Ho! forward there! Stretch every eye, to find that craft—a month's pay and leave to the one who discovers the buccaneer," cried Captain Markham, in a loud tone, and his words and generous offer put every man on the alert.

Swiftly, before an eight-knot breeze, the *Sea Hawk* sped along, and yet no sight of the buccaneer; no voice rung out with triumph at discovering the chase.

As for Mabel, she was leaning over the taffrail, quietly gazing astern, and apparently in deep thought, though she would often cast her eyes around upon her companions, and then glance again out over the waters at the long, foamy wake left by the vessel.

Presently Paul Melville came to her side, and his eyes, too, drifted out over the sea astern, when Mabel at once turned and entered into an animated conversation with the young officer; but only for a moment, as Captain Markham called the lieutenant to join him forward.

As he walked away Fred Ramsey took his place by the side of the maiden, who instantly engaged the midshipman in conversation.

But, Fred Ramsey did not reply with his usual politeness to the beautiful girl, but broke forth, after a long glance astern, in tones that rung with triumph:

"Sail, ho!"

A thrill went through every form on the vessel—a thrill of disappointment mingled with joy—disappointment to those who had not discovered the sail, joy that the schooner had been discovered.

"Where away?" cried Captain Markham.

"Dead astern, sir," rung out the middy.

"Ready about! all hands to tack ship! Live-ly, men!" and Captain Markham's loud voice sent the men nimbly to their posts. As the vessel's head came up to the wind, the upper sails shook violently, and, amid the flying of braces and sheets, the swinging round of yards, swooping across of booms, the bows went round, the sails shivered and refilled, and the *Sea Hawk* careened to the breeze and dashed away on the opposite course to that on which, five minutes before, she had been sailing.

Whether the loud cry of the midshipman had been heard on the schooner or not, it was hard to tell, but it seemed so, as the look-out forward cried out:

"A sail dead ahead, sir!"

It was no use to ask questions, for there, visible to every eye, as she spread her raking masts with canvas, and not a half-mile distant, dashing away with the speed of the wind, was the corsair craft.

Like a flying phantom the buccaneer seemed, swiftly floating over the waters, and leaning gracefully under the pressure of the wind that filled the sails.

The excitement on board the *Sea Hawk* was now intense, and every one seemed to rejoice—except two—at the speedy capture of the buccaneer.

Those two were Paul Melville and Mabel Markham, and the eyes of the young man rested upon the face of the maiden with a strange look in them. He felt assured that she had seen the schooner before the quick eyes of Fred Ramsey had discovered it, and now her manner was not that of joy.

As for Paul Melville, as the light of the binnacle fell upon his face, it showed it calm, unmoved, and stern as usual.

"Lieutenant Melville, do you think we shall capture that schooner?" asked Mabel, as the officer came near to her, and leant his arm on the bulwark.

"Why not?"

"There is a general belief, I see and hear, that she will play us some other trick—in fact that it is a shadow—a phantom schooner."

"That is the superstition of the men, Miss Markham."

"By no means the men alone; the officers are also superstitious, even my father."

"Well, I can understand it; we are so much upon the boundless sea, battling with its storms, reflecting our faces in its depths when becalmed upon its glassy waters, listening to strange stories of those who have skimmed over its waves, and seeing strange sights, that it is no wonder we seamen are superstitious. Still, no

such weird ideas have I; I believe not in the supernatural. See how the schooner bends to the breeze."

"Yes; but hark! you hear Lieutenant Redmond talking now. He says he believes the craft to be the Flying Dutchman. But what is the Flying Dutchman, Lieutenant Melville?"

"A crazy old craft, said to fly the sea by night, the crew of which never sees land, and the sight of which is dreaded by every seaman that lives, for it is said that when a vessel falls in with the Flying Dutchman it never brings its crew safely into port, or some evil befalls the craft; but if the same vessel three times catches sight of the weird craft, it is doomed, with all its crew. Such is the belief, Miss Markham."

"I pray that may not be the Flying Dutchman, then, for we have seen the schooner more than three times," said Mabel, with a slight shudder.

"We are gaining upon the buccaneer, Miss Markham. Take my glass and turn it upon him."

"Yes; but he is setting more sail, and is now running away from us."

"You are right, Miss Markham. Ay, ay, sir!" and the officer went forward toward Captain Markham, who called him.

"Melville, that fellow is dropping us, and we are doing our best. Go forward and train that long gun upon him."

"Ay, ay, sir," and a few moments after the gunner sighted the piece, the deep roar of the gun followed, while the red flash lit up the sea far ahead.

"Now, Miss Markham, you will see if the schooner is mortal," and Paul Melville again took up his place beside Mabel, while gun after gun pealed forth loudly, and sent its iron death-messenger flying after the buccaneer, which, still unhurt, held on its course.

But above the roar of the cannon suddenly came another sound, deeper, louder, wilder than man's artillery—a tremendous crash of thunder, while a vivid flash of lightning illumined the sea for miles around.

All eyes at once turned upward and astern to discover that the skies had suddenly become black with clouds.

"Curse this storm; it will yet aid the schooner," cried Captain Markham, angrily, and then he called out in loud tones:

"Make that long gun do good work. Heat it red-hot but what you cripple yonder craft!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" came from the gunner, and again and again the deep boom resounded, while peal after peal of thunder burst from the approaching storm, and vivid streams of red lightning sped in zigzag courses from the blank clouds to the wind-lashed waters.

"Oh, God!"

The voice of Mabel was drowned in the crashing peal of thunder, but all knew what brought forth that cry of anguish—the buccaneer schooner was in flames. The lightning had shivered her mainmast into atoms, and huge red flames climbed over the snow-white canvas, devouring every rope and thread which its fiery tongues lapped up.

CHAPTER XV.

A STARTLING DENOUEMENT.

"CEASE firing! Humanity, not hatred, must govern us now!"

It was Paul Melville who spoke, and springing to the wheel, he directed the course of the *Sea Hawk* so that it would not fall off half a point.

The schooner was now in flames from deck to topmast, and, no longer guided by her helm, was driving along before the wind, a fearful sight, indeed, while her crew, swarming upon the stern, were engaged in lowering the boats with all haste.

"Oh! how slow we go! Can we not go faster?" cried Mabel, in great anxiety, and then she added:

"They will perish before we reach them."

"No, they are taking to their boats, and we will pick them up. Captain Markham, shall I strip the ship to meet the storm, for we have not too much time?" and Paul Melville glanced aloft at the clouds of canvas.

"By all means, Melville: I had forgotten our own safety in looking at the schooner. See how those fellows spring over the sides; it must be hot for them."

"Not so hot as they will know hereafter," returned Lieutenant Redmond.

"A brave man, sir, should never make sport of an enemy in distress, no matter who that enemy be," and Paul Melville's eyes flashed in the bright blaze, as he turned upon the junior officer, and the moment after called out:

"All hands ahoy! to take in sail."

At the retort of Paul Melville, Lieutenant Redmond turned toward Mabel, and catching her eye, said, as if for sympathy:

"Did you hear that, Miss Markham?"

"I did, sir, and thought you well deserved it," was the quick response.

Ross Redmond turned away, an evil light coming into his eyes; but he made no reply, and Mabel once more bent her gaze upon the burning schooner, now not very far away.

"Hail them, Melville, and tell them to come aboard in their boats—that we will lay to for them, and if they need aid, we'll send a boat aboard," ordered Captain Markham.

Springing upon the bulwarks, where in the bright light his form was revealed distinctly, Paul Melville hailed:

"Schooner ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" came back in strangely cool tones.

"We will lay to; come aboard in your boats; do you need help?"

"No, sir, thank you; our two boats will hold all that lightning and fire have left," cried the same voice that had answered the hail, and then the speaker was heard to continue, addressing his crew:

"Lively, lads, lively! It's as hot here as though the devil was the fire-maker."

"A plucky fellow that. Ah, they have all got into the boats, and not much too soon, for here comes the storm," said Captain Markham.

As swiftly as possible the two boats crowded with men, pulled over the brightly-lighted waves, and came upon the lee of the Sea Hawk, as she lay to, awaiting them.

At the gangway they were met by Ross Redmond, who, after ordering the boats hauled aboard, led the buccaneers aft where stood Captain Markham, Paul Melville, and Mabel—the latter pale and nervous.

As soon as the buccaneers reached the deck the vessel was put on her course again, under storm-sails, and then Captain Markham turned to his prisoners, two-score in number, and dressed in white duck pants, blue woolen shirts and red tarpaulins, as could be distinctly seen by the light from the burning schooner.

At the head of the buccaneers were two officers, judging from their dress and appearance, for both were attired in a *neglige* uniform, and wore soft hats of light felt, encircled by silver cords.

Both were young men, one evidently a Spaniard, and the other an American, who seemed the superior officer.

"Well, sir, you are at last my prisoner," said Captain Markham, sternly.

"Yes, by the aid of Heaven, for you would never have taken us," said the young senior buccaneer officer, promptly, and his voice was recognizable as the one who had answered the hail of Paul Melville.

Captain Markham winced at this shot, but replied:

"I am sorry your schooner was lost, sir."

"So am I, sir."

"It was, I believe, the Curse of the Coast?"

"That was the name she had won, sir."

"And you, scarcely more than a boy in years, cannot be he whom men call Rafael the Rover?" continued Captain Markham, with curiosity undisguised.

"No, sir, I am not Captain Rafael."

"Indeed! then was he slain, sir?"

"No, sir; Rafael the Rover was not on board the schooner."

"Then his officers are as crafty and skillful as he is, I judge, from what I have seen the past few days."

The young officer bowed at the compliment, and Captain Markham continued:

"Who are you, then, sir?"

"My name is—" and the young officer paused, while his face flushed; but he continued immediately:

"My name is Roy Woodbridge. I am the first officer of Rafael the Rover."

"I congratulate him upon his skill in selecting officers; but where, may I ask, is your chief—the famous Rafael?"

The young officer made no reply; but his junior, the Spanish-looking young man, while a devilish glare came into his face, stepped forward and said, firmly:

"There stands our chief—Rafael the Rover!"

All eyes turned upon the man at whom he pointed. It was Paul Melville.

"Great God! sir, what do you mean?" cried Captain Markham, while a half-cry broke from the lips of Mabel.

"Just what I said, sir," continued the buccaneer officer, speaking with a marked accent.

"That man is Rafael the Rover! Now, my chief, I am avenged on you," and the Spaniard glared upon the one he accused with a baleful look of fiendish joy in his face.

The man accused stood like a statue, his face pale, his eyes flashing, and his arms crossed upon his broad breast; but he uttered no word.

"Does this man speak the truth, sir?" and Captain Markham turned to the senior lieutenant of the buccaneers.

"Senior Ramirez, here, made the accusation—not I, sir," coolly responded the young officer.

"Men, does your officer speak the truth, in accusing this gentleman of being your chief, Rafael?" and Captain Markham turned to the buccaneers, several of whom quickly replied:

"He does, sir; that is Captain Rafael."

With amazement upon every feature of his face Captain Markham turned to the accused man, and there was a slight tremor of voice as he asked:

"Speak, sir, are you Rafael the Rover?"

"That is the name that I am known by,"

came in the deep, stern tones of him whom all believed to be Paul Melville.

"Great God! There is some deep mystery in all this. You came to me with dispatches, as Lieutenant Paul Melville, of the United States navy?"

"I did, sir."

"Then how is it I find in you Rafael the Rover?"

"I assumed the character of Paul Melville, sir."

"You know him, then?"

"I do."

"From whom did you get the dispatches you brought me?"

"From Paul Melville."

"Why did you come on board this vessel?"

"That question I will not answer," firmly replied Rafael.

"Enough! Lieutenant Redmond, you are next in command now, sir, to myself. Put this man in double irons, and see that these two officers and their buccaneer crew are well guarded. Come, Mabel; come with me into the cabin."

With drooping head the maiden obeyed, just as the storm broke in fury over the vessel, and the burning schooner, half a mile away, was blown into a thousand fiery brands, which the next instant were quenched in the sea, leaving total darkness upon the tempest-lashed waters.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TRAITOR.

A RETROSPECTIVE glance will remind the kind reader that two men, one supposed to be an Englishman, the other an American, together left the *pulperia*—Cuban wine-shop or tavern—and wended their way to the dock, where the latter, to his surprise and discomfiture, suddenly found himself made prisoner by his companion, who at once carried him on board the schooner that, upon coming into the harbor, had attracted the attention particularly of Mabel Markham, as it dropped anchor near the sloop-of-war Sea Hawk.

Upon the arrival of the boat at the schooner, the prisoner was immediately placed in irons in the cabin, and the vessel at once got under way and stood out of the harbor, the Englishman standing by the side of the helmsman, who was Gomez, the Cuban.

As the schooner gained an offing, two young men, one evidently a Spaniard, the other an American, came on deck, and gradually from below appeared form after form, until half a hundred seamen had gathered forward.

"Shall we bring up the guns, sir?" asked one of the two young men, and who, upon throwing aside the outer dress of a common seaman, appeared in uniform.

"Yes; but stay; we will first dress the schooner in her good clothes," replied the Englishman, who was evidently the leader.

The young officer bowed and retired, and the schooner was at once a busy scene; the small and patched mainsail was lowered, and in its place, upon long, slender boom and gaff, was rigged a huge white sail of new duck.

Then the foresail was changed, and quickly followed the jibs and topsails, until the schooner's decks were shadowed by clouds of snowy canvas, and under the increased sail she bounded through the waters with double her former speed.

Then, as if by magic, the sea-worn look was removed from the hull, and rugged shot-marks faded away, until the craft presented a totally different appearance from what she had in port, and if there had been severe wounds in her hull and rigging, they had been carefully repaired.

"Now bring up the guns," quietly ordered the leader, and the four little cannon then on deck were lowered into the hold, and up came to replace them two long forty-twos, one of which was mounted on a pivot on the bows, and another on the stern, after which followed eight eighteens, giving the schooner, with the two pivot bow and stern chasers, a broadside of six guns—a savage armament for so small a craft.

"Now we can breathe free once more," said the leader, addressing one of his officers, who stood near him.

"Yes, sir; but did you succeed in your visit to Havana?"

"Better than I expected. I bought all the ammunition and supplies I need, and a *carera* will bring them to the island in a few days, while I sent word to the different rendezvous, that we had not visited, of the expected attack of the American sloop-of-war."

"And you brought a prisoner with you, sir?" continued the officer, inquiringly.

"Yes; I am going into the cabin now to speak with him. I was waiting at Pedro Nunez's *pulperia* for Gomez, whom you know I sent to mingle with the American seamen, to learn what he could from them as to their cruise, when I recognized a man whom I have long wished to meet once more, and I at once determined to capture him. He is the one now in the cabin. Who he is you shall soon know. Take the deck while I go below," and so saying, the commander of the vessel left the deck.

The prisoner was seated upon a divan, his

hands in irons, and a seaman standing near as a guard.

"Garcia, you can go on deck now, but be where you can come if I need you."

"Si, senor capitan," and the seaman left the cabin; the prisoner and his captor were alone together.

"Why have I been thus treated, sir?" sternly asked the prisoner, his eyes flashing in anger; and he added, as the other remained silent:

"If it is ransom you wish, you shall not have it."

"The ransom I wish, sir, is your life," replied the captor, with a vindictive gleam in his eyes.

The prisoner turned pale; there was something in the tones of the man before him that proved he was not trifling, and he asked, earnestly:

"In what have I harmed you? You must have mistaken me for some one else."

"See if I have. You are an American, born on the coast of Maine, and you come of good stock; but, a wild youth, you got into a scrape when a mere boy, and there was an unpleasant ending to it; some one got killed, and you were accused of killing him, for a rivalry existed between you; you both had the same sweetheart, and in a jealous fit of rage he fell by your hand."

"We fought and he fell fairly," sullenly said the prisoner.

"So it was believed; but there was a witness to that fatal meeting you little dreamed of, and she has told me that you, after measuring the ground, shot him down as he walked to take position, and while his pistol hung by his side."

"She has told you? In the devil's name who is she?" cried the man, savagely.

"You will soon find that out. Now listen to see if I know you:

"With a guilty conscience you fled, and went to sea, where you soon gained a deserved reputation as a good sailor, fearless and skillful, and rapidly rose from before the mast to command."

"After gallantly rescuing the survivors of a wreck, you returned to your old home, having been gone four years, and every man and woman seemed to be your friend, for it was believed you intended leading a new life, and you went once more to sea, remembered in kindness."

"Through the war between the United States and England you might have won honorable distinction, had not your vessel been captured by a pirate craft, and you became a buccaneer officer, for to gain your liberty you threw your fortune with the outlaws, and during your three years' life among them cut-Heroded Herod in your cruelty, and became third in command of one of the most daring bands that infest these waters. Am I right, sir?"

"I have nothing to say," replied the prisoner.

"Upon the island where the buccaneers I refer to had their stronghold dwelt the chief, and his son, a few years younger than yourself; also, upon the island lived a lady and her daughter, who had, when the latter was an infant, been made captives to the freebooters."

"This daughter had grown to maidenhood, and, struck with your handsome face, dashing style and courtly manners—I do not flatter, sir—she learned to love you, and believe your professions of love in return, and, in spite of the promise she had made the chief's son, who was then away, she put her whole trust in you, and was dragged down to ruin."

"How know you this, sir?" angrily cried the prisoner, springing to his feet.

"From her own lips."

"You lie, sir, she is dead. I saw her die."

"You are mistaken, as I will prove to you, sir. You made her consent to fly with you, and told her that you would visit another isle, upon which dwelt rival buccaneers, place yourself at their head and lead them against your friends, and proclaim yourself chief, and then she would be your wife."

"Trusting you, she fled with you from the island, when your boat was thrown upon her beam-ends and both of you hurled into the water."

"To save herself she clung to you, but, to save your coward life, you dashed your fist into her face and broke her hold upon you, swam to your boat, righted it, and sailed away without one thought of her whom you had ruined, and, believed, had slain."

"But a good swimmer, she did not drown, her presence of mind returned to her, and after battling with the waves for an hour, she at length reached the land and made known her story, and the treachery of one whom she had loved and trusted."

"The chief immediately sent his schooner in pursuit of you; but toward evening of the next day it returned, having reported that they had seen you picked up by an English vessel-of-war. Thus you then escaped."

"Returning to the United States you became a hero, for, your story that you were a captive of the buccaneers was readily believed, and shortly after your good fortune enabled you to save the life of an American commodore, at the risk, I admit, of your own life, and you were appointed a lieutenant in the United States

navy, and some months ago ordered to report to an American vessel-of-war as second in command, upon the representation that you knew all of the buccaneer haunts in these waters, and would lead in the attack upon them."

"How know you this, sir?"

"The buccaneers have spies in Washington at Government head-quarters, as you should know, sir, having been yourself a pirate officer."

The prisoner winced, and remained silent for a moment, and then said:

"Well, what does all this lead to?"

"To your death as a traitor," calmly said the other.

"Great God! to whom am I a traitor?"

"To the buccaneers."

"Is this craft a corsair?" anxiously asked the prisoner, and his face became ashen in hue.

"It is."

The prisoner cast his eyes around him searchingly, and then said, after a pause:

"If this vessel was differently furnished, armed and rigged I would say that it was the buccaneer schooner known as the *Curse of the Sea*."

"Your memory serves you right, sir; this schooner is the *Curse of the Sea* under a different rig from what you knew it."

"Yet you are not Rafael the Rover?" and the prisoner gazed intently into the face of the man before him.

"There are two of that name, sir;—one a man along in years, who has made himself feared upon the seas as a cruel monster, and yet who does not deserve all the ignominy heaped upon him."

"He had a son—a youth whom he brought up on his schooner as his young lieutenant, and whom, while I lived among the buccaneers, he sent to the United States to be educated in books, having himself schooled him in cutting throats! But you are not that young Rafael, for he was a brunette," and the prisoner gazed intently upon his captor, over whose face passed a quiet smile, as he raised his hands and removed, first his hat, and then a blonde wig and long beard, while he said:

"I am now Rafael the Rover, and you, Paul Melville, are a traitor and my prisoner!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SCENE IN THE CABIN.

WHEN Paul Melville, as the prisoner is now known to be, found himself in the power of Rafael the Rover, he felt that he was a doomed man, for well he knew the law among the buccaneers, to always punish a traitor with death.

Still there was one hope for him. Rafael had said he was now the Rover, and his father must then be dead. If such was the case Paul Melville might prevail upon his captor to spare his life, for he knew that the young man was not naturally cruel or unjust; but if he had to deal with the old chief, well he realized that no earthly power could save him.

Anxiously, therefore, he now turned his gaze upon the young man before him, while he said:

"You, then, are the chief of the island buccaneers?"

"Yes."

"Your father, then, is dead?"

"Not so; he was severely wounded in an engagement with a vessel of war, and yielded his command to me, as the slightest exertion on his part would cause his death."

"Is he with you?"

"No, he is at the island whither I am now bound."

The prisoner dropped his head and set his teeth firmly together.

After a moment he asked:

"And it is your intention to have me die, Rafael?"

"It is, Paul Melville. When my father sent me to the States you could have gone with me, for you remember then how we liked you; but no, your heart was evil, and you preferred to remain with the buccaneers, and ere long I learned that you led even our worst men in cruelty toward prisoners, while you won from me the love of a maiden, who had been the only gleam of sunshine in my wild life. Nay, I learned that you had deliberately wronged her, and then left her to die in the waters, while she was flying with you, in whom she trusted."

"Remember, Rafael, we were friends."

"Ay, and I remember how you abused that friendship."

"I was mad then—a fool! But spare me, Rafael, for none here know who I am. I know not the men who came in the boat with me, and hence they cannot know me."

"I plead with you, Rafael, to put about and carry me to Havana, and I swear to you that I will never raise an arm against you—I swear it upon my honor!"

"Your honor! The honor of one who would bring shame upon a woman and then attempt to take her life—the honor of a buccaneer," sneered the young chief.

"And yet it was said that you always had honor."

"Ay; I struck not down the defenseless, I brought not women to dishonor, and I spared all I could from the fury of our mad crew, and I kept my word even to the bitter end; but I

learned by intercourse with honorable men that such as I, and those I lead, are blots upon the earth, and were it not for my poor old father, whose wrongs have been deep, I would hide my head forever in some secluded spot of the earth, where the hated name of pirate would never reach me; but don't you talk to me of honor—you who gave up a life of honor for one of crime, and would have betrayed your comrades as cruelly as you had betrayed the woman who trusted you."

"Satan lecturing sin," sneered Paul Melville.

"So be it, if so you like it; but, buccaneer chief though I be, I will not again rob and pillage, and only cruise in this schooner to accomplish an end which my father has failed to do in twenty long years."

"His career, at first intending no harm, brought pursuit upon him, and he became the football of Fate, and called a buccaneer ere he had dreamed the name, he became reckless and hoisted the black flag, and upon a pirate deck I was reared; but, Paul Melville, I see the hand of Fate in your crossing my path, and I shall turn it to advantage, and end, as quickly as possible, this wild career I lead, hunted upon every sea as a cruel monster, a pirate, whom all fear as a fiend incarnate."

"Then, if you are not wicked at heart, why will you carry me to my doom—why turn me over to your cruel father?"

"My duty toward those whom I command, and would not betray, compels me to do so; but you shall have a fair trial, according to our laws, and if acquitted, I pledge you my word that you shall leave the island unharmed; if found guilty of the charges against you, then you must meet your fate as best you can."

"You may well promise to let me go free, if acquitted, for you know that I will be found guilty."

"Then you must die. But this argument is useless; you are the bearer of dispatches from your government to Captain Markham, of the sloop-of-war, *Sea Hawk*?"

"How know you this?"

"I knew that you were to have borne dispatches, and sailed upon the brig *Sunbeam*, some time ago; but illness, I have learned, prevented you, and another brought the papers. Recognizing you to-night, and hearing from your companion, the Spanish captain, that you had just come from the States with him, I naturally supposed that, upon your recovery, you had again been ordered to report to the *Sea Hawk*, and, as a matter of course, must bear with you the latest dispatches from your government; am I right?"

Paul Melville was silent for some time, and then he said earnestly:

"Rafael, I have a chance, no matter how I find it out, of becoming, in a short while, the possessor of vast wealth. Give me my life, and, I swear to you, I will share with you the half I get."

"You forget that you are offering a bribe to a buccaneer chief, sir, who is said to possess untold riches," said the rover, with bitterness, and he added:

"I am not to be bribed, sir. You must take your chances. As I do not wish to humble you, I will give you the freedom of the schooner until we reach the island. Here, sir; I will remove your irons; but I warn you against any attempt at trifling with my crew."

As Rafael spoke he unlocked the iron wristlets of the prisoner, and then said:

"Now those dispatches, please."

Paul Melville's face darkened, and his eyes held a baleful light, while his muscles twitched nervously, and it flashed through his mind to spring upon the man before him, slay him, and then proclaim himself chief; but a second thought decided him against such a foolhardy attempt, and he took from his pocket a package of official-looking papers and handed them to Rafael, who took them quietly, and asked:

"Are these all that you possess?"

"Yes, excepting my private papers."

"I will take those, too, if you please, and if you are acquitted will return them to you inviolate; if you die, it will make no difference to you what becomes of them."

With an unuttered curse, Paul Melville handed out, from an inner pocket, a large leathern wallet, which Rafael transferred, with the dispatches, to his own keeping, after which he left the cabin and ascended to the deck.

Glancing around him for a moment, and seeing that the land was nowhere visible, he turned to the officer of the deck and said, abruptly:

"Head for the island, Mr. Woodbridge."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PLOT.

It was not a very long sail from Havana to the buccaneer island, and the fleet schooner soon threw the leagues astern, and dropped anchor in the secluded basin, just before the hour of noon.

Instead of presenting the desolate, deserted appearance that it did when the crew of the *Sea Hawk* landed, some days after, a busy scene met the eyes of the returned buccaneers, for the white beach was crowded with men, and among

them were a few women and children, welcoming back the schooner, and expecting a fresh supply of booty and provisions from captured vessels.

With stern face, and quiet mien, Rafael rowed ashore, and by his side in the gig's stern sheets was seated Paul Melville, his eyes downcast, and livid countenance turned away from those on the beach.

Among the crowd gathered to welcome the returned buccaneers, three persons were most conspicuous—the tall, heavy-bearded man who is presented to the reader in the opening chapters of this story, and who is known as old Rafael, the Chief.

He is dressed as before, and his eyes are turned anxiously upon the boat, until he recognizes the form of his son; then they glow with pleasure.

Near his side stands a woman already known to the reader, and in whose face can be read the stamp of madness.

Yet she is calm, and her eyes only seem wild and restless, while the lines upon her face prove that she has known much of sorrow in the past.

This woman, whose crazy fancies are allowed full sway, and whom all fear on the island, believing her possessed of some supernatural power, is known as Mad Maud, a name she does not resent, for long since the aching of her heart have told her that reason had crazed her brain.

Near Mad Maud stands a maiden, in face strangely like her—in fact her daughter.

Like her mother she is also called by her Christian name, before which is the descriptive adjective of Pretty, for the rude seamen, when the maiden was a mere child, had named her Pretty Nellie.

That Nellie had deserved the title of pretty was evident, for she was a beauty with golden curls and liquid blue eyes that were full of tenderness and expression, while her form was petite and perfectly molded, and her every act one of unstudied grace.

But eighteen years of age, the maiden seemed older, perhaps, when one glanced closely into her face, for there were lines of sorrow around the rosy mouth, and the eyes were so sad that they appeared to be ever full of unshed tears.

Unlike her mother's ghostly dress, the maiden was attired in becoming costume, such as was worn by girls half a century ago, and her golden curls were shaded by a broad panama hat, trimmed with natural wild flowers.

As Rafael sprang ashore a loud cheer greeted him, which he acknowledged by raising his hat, while he warmly grasped his father's hand.

"Welcome back, my boy. Does he yet live?" eagerly said the chief.

"He yet lives, sir; but I have much to say to you. Shall we go to the cabin?"

"Yes, at once," and locking his arm in that of his son, the chief led the way, the young man simply bowing to the salutation of Pretty Nellie, and shaking hands with Mad Maud, who said in her wild manner:

"Brave captain! Mad Maud told them that you would soon return."

"Well, my son, what tidings have you?" asked the old chief, as the two entered a rude, but comfortable cabin, furnished wholly with the cabin furniture of unfortunate vessels that had struck their flags to the black ensign, with its red anchor, of Rafael the Rover.

"Well, sir, first, the man in the boat with me is Paul Melville, the traitor."

"By the Eternal! Has he dared come back here?"

"I brought him here. He is at present an officer, a lieutenant, in the navy of the United States, and was ordered to the sloop-of-war *Sea Hawk*, to cruise against the buccaneers of these waters."

"The traitor, doubly dyed!" hissed the old chief.

"I learned from our spy in Havana, who just had dispatches from Washington, that he was to sail on a certain brig, and I went in search of that vessel, captured her after a long chase, and found that he was not on board, so released the vessel."

"Why did you do that?"

"The brig was an American, sir, and, as I told you when I took command of the schooner, I will not strike at the merchant service of the United States."

"Foolish boy; but, what will the men say?"

"I will, if compelled to, strike the vessels of Spain—they are richly freighted; but I will not be a buccaneer, except in name, as far as the ships of other nations are concerned, and, you well know, sir, I took command of the schooner for one certain purpose."

"Yes—go on—what about that traitor?"

"Two vessels-of-war chased me away from the brig, and I came near being sunk by a broadside from each of them; but I took in sail at once, seizing upon this as a means of safety, and as a storm and night were coming on I lay undiscovered upon the water, and doubtless was believed to have gone to the bottom."

"Knowing that the strongholds on the island were to be attacked, I then warned those nearest to me, repaired damages, and disguising my vessel ran into Havana, where I found, by acci-

dent, drinking in a *pulperia*, Paul Melville, he having just come from the United States.

"Being disguised he failed to recognize me, and I got him into my power and made him my prisoner, carrying him on board the schooner."

"Setting sail I came at once here, sir, and we will together glance over the dispatches of which he was the bearer, after which I will propose to you my plan of action. Here are the dispatches, sir. I opened them in such a way that they can be closed and no one would suspect that they had been tampered with."

The old chief eagerly seized the papers, and hastily scanned each one of them, after which he said, savagely:

"The accursed traitor—he shall die for this. Why, he was, so say these papers, to lead the sloop against this very island; and that man—he whom I have sought these long, long years—commands the vessel sent against us. So be it; the end is coming, and it shall be a bitter one. Come; I shall have the wretch hung at once to the schooner's yard-arm."

"Hold, father! I have promised that he should be tried according to our laws, and it must be so," said Rafael, firmly.

"So be it," moodily answered the old chief.

"Now, sir, I have a plan to propose to you."

"Yes, I remember you said so; I am listening."

"Father, Paul Melville is not known to the officers or men on the Sea Hawk."

"Well, what does that signify?"

"That I might personate him—carry these dispatches myself to Walter Markham, and visit the island strongholds with him."

"By Heaven! Boy, you are a lawyer for plotting. You can in this way accomplish the aim for which I have struggled so long," exclaimed the old chief, excitedly, while a savage gleam came into his eyes.

"Yes, I can bring this hunted life to an end, and far away from these scenes seek some spot where the name of buccaneer is not connected with our names."

"I live for but one purpose, boy, and that you well know. When that is accomplished, I am willing to cut my cable and sail for the seaport beyond this life; but what is your plan, Rafael?"

"To go on board the Sea Hawk, report as Paul Melville, and sail for this island, which I desire to seem deserted. You well know how that can be arranged."

"Then I will steer for other rendezvous, which likewise must be warned of our coming, and when I have thus gained the confidence of Walter Markham, I will decide upon a plan for getting him into my power."

"Rafael, I will trust all to you; but why bring the vessel into this basin, and then allow it to depart?"

"It is not the vessel and her crew our quarrel is with, and I can, by so doing, prove to Walter Markham that I know these islands well, and thereby gain his confidence, and that of his men. Why, they might run in and out of the channel in broad daylight a hundred times, and then not be able to come safely through without a pilot."

"My plans are not yet definitely arranged; but if you will trust to me, I will have all come right in the end."

"I will trust you, boy; but you run a fearful risk in going on board the vessel."

"I think not, sir. I am not known to the officers and crew, and neither is Paul Melville. I will cut my hair close, shave off my mustache, and in other ways disguise myself; but I must return to Havana at once. It is pleasant weather, and I will take the *carera* and half a dozen men, who can come back as soon as they have landed me, and within ten days I will be here in the Sea Hawk."

"All shall be as you desire. If they can find any sign that the island is not deserted, they have keener eyes than I give them credit for; but in Satan's name what is that row?" and the old chief sprung to his feet, as there were heard voices in anger, cries of revenge, oaths, and then a pistol-shot.

But Rafael was already on his way to the shore, running with the fleetness of the wind, for in an instant he had surmised what was the trouble, while a glance proved to him that he was right in his conjecture; the buccaneers were endeavoring to seize Paul Melville, and bring upon him speedy justice.

CHAPTER XIX.

BUCCANEER JUSTICE.

WHEN Rafael and the old chief went to the cabin, he left Paul Melville in the boat with the coxswain and four oarsmen, having forgotten to order the prisoner sent right on to the guard-house, where refractory buccaneers were placed as punishment.

In conversing with the men in the boat, the crowd soon learned that the schooner had made no capture of prizes, and this created a turbulent feeling among them, which the coxswain unfortunately increased by the remark:

"Well, lads, we have not come back empty-handed."

"What do you mean, man?" asked a huge Englishman.

"See here, we have brought you a traitor to try. You know his face, don't you?"

Paul Melville had kept his face studiously from the crowd on the beach, but at the remark of the coxswain, he turned it half-defiantly upon the buccaneers.

Instantly he was recognized, and a howl of rage went up from the crowd, while above all was heard a woman's shriek, and Pretty Nellie fell fainting into her mother's arms.

The conduct of Paul Melville toward the maiden was known to all there, and his attempt to have her drown, and intention to betray his comrades she had made known, and the direst threats were made against him should he fall into their hands, for the buccaneers could forgive a murderer, or a robber who risked his life for plunder, but they would not forgive the man who had wronged Pretty Nellie, the Angel of the Isle, as she was called, and then, to save his own life, had attempted to drown her; besides, had he not intended to betray them all? and a traitor, in their sight, was the vilest of men.

Seeing that he had made a mistake in making known who the prisoner was, and fearful of the row he had unintentionally started, the coxswain gave a quick order to the crew to back water, and pull away from the shore.

But he was too late, for a dozen men rushed into the water and firmly seized the boat and oars.

"Hold on, Matt Morton, or we'll serve you as we would him, the cursed traitor," and the English seaman, before spoken of, held firmly on to the gunwale with one hand, while he drew his sheath-knife with the other.

Having gotten into trouble, the coxswain, a fearless man, was not slow in attempting to extricate himself, and he quickly drew a pistol, and leveling it at the head of the Englishman, said, in determined tones:

"Luke Faherty, this prisoner was left in my hands, by Captain Rafael, and I'm cursed if I don't protect him, so I warn you to let go of this boat."

"Give us the traitor and I will let you go; but I'll settle with you afterward, Matt Morton, for drawing a weapon on me," said Luke Faherty, now thoroughly determined to have the prisoner.

"Yes, give us the traitor," shrieked the crowd, and a score of savage men now surrounded the boat, though standing up to their waists in the water.

As for the prisoner, though deadly pale, he yet seemed calm, and said, in resolute tones:

"Coxswain, give me one of your pistols, and I will aid you in discharging your duty."

"He's game, anyhow; but it won't save him," yelled Luke Faherty, now the acknowledged ringleader, and then, turning to his followers, he continued:

"Drag the boat ashore, boys, and every one of these fellows shall die for resisting us."

"That's so; they've got to go under; no right to resist," yelled a score of men, gazing upon the four oarsmen, who had dropped their oars and drawn their cutlasses to aid the coxswain.

Rapidly, in obedience to the order of their ringleader, the men dragged the boat to the beach, and the keel grated upon the pebbles.

"What means this?" and a tall, slender form darted through the crowd and confronted Luke Faherty and his gang.

It was Rafael, and his eyes flashed fire, his teeth were set firm, and one hand held a pistol, the other his cutlass.

"We want the traitor, captain," began the ringleader, politely, and he added, with dogged determination:

"We intend to hang him."

"Luke Faherty, I captured that prisoner and I intend that he shall be tried, and if found guilty he must die; if innocent he shall go free. Coxswain, carry the prisoner to the guard-house."

"Ay, ay, sir!" said Matt Morton, cheerfully, delighted that the responsibility no longer rested with him to protect the life of Paul Melville.

"He's a traitor! Seize him, boys!" yelled Luke Faherty, savagely, and he pressed forward, backed by the men on shore.

In an instant Rafael confronted the ringleader, while his voice rung out in hail:

"Ahoy the schooner!"

"Ahoy!" came promptly in the voice of the lieutenant in charge, Roy Woodbridge.

"Send me two boats' crews ashore immediately—well armed!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Train your guns on this crowd, and if I give the order, fire, regardless of consequences!" and Rafael's voice rung with threatening determination.

And, as he spoke, from the other side of the schooner, rounding the bow and stern, came the two boats, crowded with men, for seeing that there was trouble ashore, Roy Woodbridge had already prepared to go to the assistance of his chief.

At the order of Rafael to fire upon the crowd, if necessary, the wildest confusion followed, the women shrieking with fear, the children crying, and men swearing, while the crowd swayed vio-

lently and ran in all directions, excepting Luke Faherty and his gang, a score in number. He, with his supporters, still stood their ground, confronting Rafael, at whose back were Paul Melville, Matt Morton and the four carsmen, all prepared to uphold their young captain.

A few paces distant, gazing with interest upon the scene, his arms folded upon his breast, and dark, cruel eyes flashing, was the old chief, whose name had so long been a terror upon the sea.

Swiftly the two boats came shoreward, and feeling that he must act promptly, Luke Faherty cried out:

"Boys, we must have that traitor! Let's kill him before the boats come—now!" and the ringleader sprung forward.

But he was seized and hurled back with terrific force, falling heavily upon the ground, while the foot of Rafael was upon his throat, and his voice rung as he cried:

"Hold! men, you run your heads into the very noose intended for this man. Down with your arms!"

To a man, the weapons were thrown upon the ground, as the eagle eyes of the young chief met their gaze, and with one accord, as the followers of Luke Faherty saw the boats almost upon them, they turned and bounded away.

As the two cutters struck the shore, Rafael raised his foot from the throat of the prostrate man, whose face had become livid with fear, and dark from the choking he had received.

"Thank you, Senor Ramirez; you are in time. See that this prisoner goes to the guard-house and is securely bound. As for this man, take him with you also, and to-morrow, at sunrise, lead him forth to execution."

"Mercy, Captain Rafael; mercy, sir! I did but wish to punish the traitor, sir," gasped the terror-stricken mutineer.

"I have said it, sir. To-morrow you die. You resisted my authority, and your doom is death. Lead him away, senor!"

The Spanish officer, Louis Ramirez, led the mutineer and Paul Melville away to the guard-house, while turning to Matt Morton, Rafael continued:

"Coxswain, order the assembling of all on the plaza, to try the prisoner we brought with us, and tell Lieutenant Woodbridge to come ashore with all the crew except a guard for the vessel."

Without another word Rafael turned away, and joining his father, the two retraced their way toward the cabin they had left so suddenly a short while before.

"Boy, you did well. Why, I was surprised at your great strength. You handled that fellow as though he were a child; I expected you to kill him," said the old chief, with admiration.

"No, sir, I care not to stain my hands with blood, if it can be avoided. The laws of our band condemn him to die, for mutiny, and he will have to be shot," replied Rafael, quietly.

"And shall be; but here come the crowd," and from different points began to gather the band of buccaneers, on the open space fronting the cabin head-quarters, and which was called the plaza, for here all important orders, regarding the band, were read, and the trials of the guilty were held.

It was fully an hour before all the band were assembled on the plaza, and then they stood in a semicircle, fronting the cabin door, before which were placed several seats.

When all was in readiness for the trial, the prisoners were brought forward, three in number.

Two of the three were Paul Melville, the alleged traitor, and Luke Faherty, the mutineer; the third was a dark-browed, evil-faced Cuban, who scowled savagely upon the crowd.

The guard that marched the prisoners to the plaza placed them upon benches, and then took their stand behind them, the crowd also standing; for trials in that wild band lasted only a short while.

When all was in readiness, the old chief came out of the cabin, accompanied by Captain Rafael, Roy Woodbridge, Luis Ramirez, and several other sub-officers.

These all took seats, placed for them near the prisoners, the old chief's chair being in advance of the others.

"Is all in readiness for the trial?" asked the senior, in his deep tones.

"All, sir; the prisoners are before you," answered the keeper of the guard-house.

"Then the trial will begin. Bring forward the first prisoner to be tried."

The dark-faced fellow was at once brought before his chief, who asked:

"Of what is this man accused?"

"Of stealing from his comrades," replied the keeper of the guard-house.

"Who makes the charge against him?"

Half a dozen of the band stepped forward, and their testimony was heard. They had long suspected the prisoner of robbing them, and having caught him at last, in the act, and found the stolen property upon him, they had demanded his arrest.

The old chief looked over the accusers, and then said:

"Prisoner, what have you to say?"

The man preserved a dogged silence, and after again receiving no answer to his question, the chief continued:

"Our laws demand the life of any member of the band who steals from a comrade. Upon the high seas we seek riches at the cannon's mouth and cutlass's point; but the man who will cowardly steal from his companions, who have risked their lives to get what they have, deserves death, and to death I now condemn him."

The man still preserved a sullen silence, and the chief motioned for the next prisoner to be placed before him.

"Of what is this man accused?" asked the self-constituted judge, as Luke Faherty was brought forward.

"Of mutiny, sir," said the keeper.

"Who accuses him?"

"I do, sir. I found him creating a disturbance upon the beach, and endeavoring to take from Coxswain Morton a prisoner," said Captain Rafael.

"Coxswain, what have you to say?" and the chief turned to Matt Morton, who arose and made known how the disturbance began.

"Is there a dissenting voice to this charge?" asked the chief, looking over the crowd.

No reply came, and the chief continued:

"Men who live the lives that we do, at war with the world, and hunted down upon every sea, must be ruled with an iron hand, for all depends upon a severe government that cannot be broken; hence, Luke Faherty, you knowing our laws, and having willfully broken them, must suffer the penalty of your crime—death."

"Oh, mercy, chief! I was mad; I meant not to rebel," groaned the unhappy man.

"When the sentence is passed against you, sir, there is no law to pardon you; you must die," answered the chief, and the prisoner was returned to his seat, and Paul Melville brought forward.

A murmur passed over the crowd as the prisoner took his place, and then the chief asked:

"Of what is this man accused?"

"Of being a traitor, sir. There are also other charges against him," responded the keeper.

"Who is his accuser in the first charge?" demanded the chief.

There came no reply, and Paul Melville glanced up, a look of hope upon his face.

After a silence of some moments the chief again asked the question, and the guard-house keeper replied:

"The charge is made by Pretty Nellie."

"Where is she?"

No one answered, and the chief said, decidedly:

"She must appear. Seek, and bring her here."

A few moments after the maiden appeared, accompanied by her mother.

Pretty Nellie was deadly pale, and her eyes were red with weeping; but she was calm now, and took her stand as a witness against the man she had loved with all her heart—the man who had dishonored her, and then attempted to take her life.

"Maiden, tell all that you know of the charge against this person," commanded the old chief.

In a low, yet distinct voice, and avoiding the eye of Paul Melville, who gazed upon her with a thrilling glance, Pretty Nellie told her story in a few concise words, of how the prisoner had declared to her that he had joined the buccaneers to in the end betray them, and had intended flying to another band and leading them against the island, and declare himself chief, after which, with the wealth thus gained, he would fly with her to another land and live there in the enjoyment of his riches, with her for a wife.

"And, in flying from the island at night, he carried you with him?" asked the chief.

"He did, sir."

"Why did he do this?"

"I think he feared to leave me behind, fearful lest I might betray him by accident."

"And in leaving the island, he endeavored to take your life?"

"He did not make an effort to save me, sir, and thrust me from him when I would have clung to him," answered the maiden, in trembling tones.

"Yet he had told you he loved you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And believed that you loved him?"

"He knew it, sir," and the maiden's face flushed crimson, and then became very pale.

"Maiden, your testimony against the prisoner is most damaging; but as our laws demand that to condemn a prisoner there must be more than one accuser, I now call upon those present to speak out, if they have anything to say against this man."

Captain Rafael immediately stepped forward, and the face of Pretty Nellie became as livid as that of Paul Melville.

"Your charges against this man are what, sir?" asked the chief.

"That he is a traitor. Here is the proof," and Rafael produced the dispatches addressed to Captain Walter Markham, of the American sloop-of-war, Sea Hawk.

These were read, and stated that Paul Melville, who had once been the captive of the buc-

cancers, would pilot the vessel to the pirate islands and lead the attack against the strongholds of the daring sea-rovers.

"Prisoner, what have you to say?" asked the old chief.

"I would say that all the maiden has said is false, excepting that I tried to escape from this island, and at her entreaty, took her with me. In escaping, a squall upset my boat, and she, as I believed then, was drowned. Tiring of my life ashore, I obtained an appointment in the navy, and it was my intention to have guided the Sea Hawk hither, first sending you word of my coming, and capturing the cruiser, to make her a corsair craft, for a better vessel does not float."

Paul Melville spoke in a firm tone, and with an air of frankness that caused his words to seem truthful; but the old chief was not deceived, and replied:

"Your story is well planned, sir; but you are a traitor, so proven by these papers, and the word of yonder maiden, and I now pronounce your sentence."

Rising to his feet the old chief continued:

"To-morrow morning, after sunrise, you, Paul Melville, for the crime of betraying your comrades, shall be taken from the guard-house to the schooner, and there hung at the yard-arm until you are dead."

"Hung!" almost shrieked the doomed man.

"Ay, hung; and those two men, at sunrise to-morrow morning, shall be led to this spot and be shot dead by a guard of six men, selected as executioners."

"Keeper, see that these sentences are carried out!" and the old chief wheeled and entered his cabin, followed by his son, while the other officers and the crowd dispersed from the plaza, the three prisoners, gloomy and despairing, being led back to their place of confinement.

CHAPTER XX.

THWARTING A VILLAIN.

AFTER the trial of the three prisoners, and their condemnation to death, Rafael re-entered the cabin with his father, and the two held a long conversation regarding the future movements of the young man, who had fully determined upon impersonating Paul Melville, and going on board of the Sea Hawk.

Having arranged their plans to their satisfaction, Rafael went down to the beach and ordered that the *carera*, a trim-looking little craft much used in Cuban waters, should be made ready for sea that night, and calling to the coxswain, Matt Morton, he told him to select a crew of six men from the islanders and go on board shortly after sunset.

Having thus arranged for his departure on his perilous undertaking, Captain Rafael lighted a cigar and strolled up the glen beyond the cabins, as if desiring to be alone with his thoughts, and not knowing that, half an hour before, two men had taken the very path he was now following, and which led to the hills above, in the interior of the island.

These two men were Luis Ramirez, the second lieutenant on board the schooner, and Salvador, the keeper of the guard-house on the island.

When the prisoners had been securely locked within the cabin, and a guard placed over them, Salvador put the key into his pocket for safe keeping, and turned away, to be suddenly confronted by Luis Ramirez.

"Well, *amigo* Salvador, how have you been since I left you for a cruise, some time since?" asked the young and handsome Spaniard.

"I have been well, Senor Ramirez, I thank you; and so has the one you left in my care," he added, in a low tone.

"Hush! Be careful here, for these rocks and trees have ears; but come with me up the glen," and the Spaniard led the way, the Cuban slowly following.

"Now, Salvador, what have you to say?" and the young officer came to a halt out of sight of the cabins.

"Well, senor, she is well, yet gloomy."

"Not yet subdued, I suppose?"

"No, senor; she swears she will never yield to your demand."

"Curse her stubbornness! She shall. I have not run myself into danger to let her escape me now," savagely said Ramirez, and he quickly added:

"You gave her every care, I hope?"

"Si, Senor Ramirez; she had all the food she could eat—and every attention I could bestow upon her; but I had to be careful, you know."

"Certainly, you were right; and no one suspects?"

"None, sir. I did dread Mad Maud, some time since, for I met her coming up here quite often; but I do not think she has discovered anything, senor."

"If she does all will be ruined; but I will go now and see her for myself. Have you the key?"

"Here it is, senor," and Salvador handed the officer a large key.

"And here is gold for you, Salvador. I will leave the key with you upon my return, and wish you to continue your care of the maiden. Is the old negress with her?"

"Yes, senor, and I tell you she is a tigress; but her love for her mistress keeps her in check, since your threat."

"It is right. *Adios*, Salvador!" and the Spaniard turned and continued on up the glen, while the keeper retraced his way down the hillside.

As he disappeared in a clump of trees, Rafael came down the hillside by another path, and suddenly found himself face to face with Mad Maud.

"Well, madam," he said, pleasantly, "are you out gathering wild flowers?"

"No, senor; I am out on a different mission—watching a villain," said the woman, with a cunning smile.

"Indeed! Who has incurred your displeasure?"

"Two men. One of them has just gone up the hill ahead of you."

"To whom do you refer, Maud?" interested by the woman's manner.

"I refer to Luis Ramirez."

"Why, what can he be doing away from the schooner?" asked Rafael, with some surprise.

"You may rest assured that it is not anything good."

"Maud, your manner and your words prove that you have something to say to me. Speak; I am listening."

"I will speak. Captain Rafael, what know you of Luis Ramirez?" asked the woman, impressively.

"Very little. I believe he is a Spaniard, comes of a good family, and came to Cuba as an officer of a vessel-of-war, but for his wild career in Havana was dismissed the service, and recklessly united himself with our band. Is there aught else?"

"Yes; the time the schooner went north to bring you back to the island, Luis Ramirez, as your father was very ill from his wound, was left in command of the *band*, and one night he went on board the *carera*, which put to sea and was gone several days."

"Upon its return, I noticed that the Senor Ramirez made frequent trips up this path, and when he sailed with you in the schooner, I observed another person taking these walks—"

"Who was that?"

"His name I will not give; he has been kind to me, and I will not betray him; besides, except in keeping a secret from you and the chief, for which he was liberally paid, he has done no harm, and is true to you and the band. No, I will tell you no more, if you demand his name," said the woman, firmly.

"Very well; it matters not, so he is not very guilty, and I leave you to be the judge. Now, what of Ramirez?"

"Well, by watching the person who took these walks, after the departure of Ramirez, I made a discovery that I think you ought to know. The lieutenant has just gone up the mountain; will you come with me and see what devilment he is in?"

"Yes, lead on."

Mad Maud glanced at Rafael, as though to see if he were armed, and then led the way, disappearing among the shadows of the trees, closely followed by the young buccaneer.

In the meantime Luis Ramirez had gone on up the hillside for the distance of half a mile, until he came to the solid wall of a cliff, which towered above him some forty feet.

Against the face of the rock grew some vines and trailing moss, and pushing them aside the mouth of a cave was revealed.

Entering the narrow aperture, he passed in, as though acquainted with the surroundings, and penetrating through the narrow tunnel, soon came out into an opening, hardly the eighth of an acre in size, and surrounded upon all sides by natural walls of rock.

On one side stood a small cabin, made of stout planks, and with the door closed, and several small apertures, intended for windows, opened.

Taking the key from his pocket the Spaniard placed it in the lock, and the next instant the door was opened, revealing a small room, containing two cots, two chairs, a table, several dishes, a jar of water and some books.

There were two occupants in the room—a maiden of eighteen, with the large dark eyes and black hair of a daughter of Cuba, and an old negress, perhaps fifty years of age.

The young girl was reclining upon one of the cots, and as the door opened, had evidently thrown down a book she had been reading. The old negress sat on a chair, her head in her hands.

As the maiden glanced up when Luis Ramirez entered, her beautiful face flushed, and a look of scorn curled her lips, as she said, quietly:

"You have returned, then—the buccaneer still escapes the hangman's rope?"

"Ha! your proud spirit is still unconquered then, Inez Revilla?" angrily said the Spaniard.

"Assuredly. You can never break my spirit, Luis Ramirez. I will die here, rather than become your wife."

"And die you shall, girl, if you do not consent. I have given you two months to consider the matter, and you shall yet be the Senora Ramirez."

"Never!" exclaimed the maiden, while the old negress gave a deep groan.

"Inez," and the Spaniard suddenly spoke in strangely soft tones, "Inez, if you will become my wife, I will give up the life I now lead, and together we will fly to another land and live in happiness—"

"Happiness! Can you, whose hands are red with crime—you, the second officer of the buccaneer schooner, *Curse of the Sea*, talk of happiness?"

"Hold, Inez, and hear me," and there was no anger in the tones. "You know how I love you, and—"

"And yet disgraced yourself, and then became a buccaneer, as I now know you to be."

"Yet I love you, Inez."

"I do not believe it, Luis Ramirez, and I hate myself that I ever loved you. *'Love me!'* Why, shame on you for so desecrating the word."

"Whether I love or hate you, you shall be my wife; and if Captain Rafael does not sail to-morrow—"

"But Captain Rafael sails to-night."

The maiden uttered a quick cry; the Spaniard gave vent to an oath, and the negress to a yell of delight, as the stern voice was heard, and the tall form of a man appeared in the doorway.

"Well, Senor Ramirez, what means this?" and Rafael fastened his eyes upon the surprised lieutenant, who said, almost savagely:

"It means, Captain Rafael, that this lady is a prize of mine, whom, to guard well, I brought to this retreat in the hills, and which I believed was unknown to you."

"You were mistaken, Senor Ramirez, for you see I am here. What have you to say, lady?" and Rafael turned his eyes upon the maiden, whose face was now flushed with hope, as she said:

"Senor, I came not here willingly with this man."

"Then you shall leave it, senorita."

"Oh, bless you, bless you! Sainted Virgin, I thank thee for bringing him hither!" cried the maiden, clasping her hands.

"Thank the Virgin, then, fair Inez, for transferring you from my keeping to that of Rafael the Rover," sneered Luis Ramirez.

"Oh, God in heaven! Is that man Rafael the Rover?" almost shrieked the maiden.

"He is the commander of the schooner known as the *Curse of the Coast*," again said the Spaniard.

Inez Revilla took a quick step forward, and gazing earnestly into the face of the man before her, asked, eagerly:

"Senor, speak. Does this man tell the truth?"

"He does, lady; but you are safe, and I will return you to your home, if you care not to remain here with the Senor Ramirez."

"Remain here with him? Sooner would I die!"

"Then you shall leave this cabin at once. Ramirez, this lady is now under my care; do you return, sir, at once on board the schooner," and Rafael turned sternly toward his lieutenant, who, with a face black with rage, left the cabin, but hesitated, as though about to return, dropped his hand upon the butt of his pistol, and then, as though changing his mind, walked from the hut and disappeared in the tunnel leading through the rocky wall.

"Senor, beware of that man; he means revenge," said the maiden, as she saw the dark, prison-worked face of Luis Ramirez.

"I do not fear him, lady; but, tell me, how is it I find you here—a prisoner?" and Rafael spoke with a kindness of tone that at once gained the confidence of the young girl.

"I can tell you in a few words, sir. That man, Luis Ramirez, was, two years ago, my betrothed husband, but his evil course led me to sever the engagement with him."

"You did right; and he has kidnapped you in some way, intending to drag you down to infamy?"

"No, he wishes me to become his wife, yet it is not from love of me, but for love of gold. Two years ago my father died, leaving me half of his vast wealth; the other half he left to Luis Ramirez, whom we all believed honorable, when he should become my husband. My breaking my engagement with him, keeps him from falling heir to that wealth."

"I understand; and he would force you to marry him?"

"Yes, senor, and to do so he came to my plantation home, which is on the coast, watched his chance, and when my old nurse, here, and myself were walking out one afternoon on the beach, we were seized by Luis Ramirez and two men, and brought hither, landing at night; and here we have been prisoners ever since, threatened with instant death if we made our presence known in any way."

"Senorita, deeply do I feel for you in your misfortune, and I will do all in my power to serve you. To-night you shall leave this island, and I will carry you in my *carera* and land you at your own home. When it is dark I will come and conduct you to the landing, and carry you on board with me."

Here the maiden could make reply, and with the joyous cry of the old negress ringing in his

ears, Rafael turned quickly and left the cabin, and rapidly retraced his way by the path he had come.

CHAPTER XXI.

A WOMAN'S LOVE.

WHEN Pretty Nellie had given her testimony against her recreant lover, Paul Melville, she felt that she had been avenged upon him for all the harm he had done her, and a triumphant light filled her eyes; but when the dread sentence of death had been passed upon him, and she knew that, with the morrow, he must die, she covered her face with her hands and fled from the plaza.

Seeking her own cabin—a neat little structure, where she and her mad mother dwelt—the maiden threw herself upon a ship's divan and burst into tears—tears that shook her whole frame and came from her inmost heart.

At length she ceased weeping, and springing to her feet began to pace the room excitedly.

"I believed I had cast out of my heart every thought of him, and yet it cannot be so, if his coming death affects me in this way."

"I believed that I had learned to hate him—yet I find him still in my heart. Oh! God! and with to-morrow's sun he must die! The thought is terrible, and yet it is true."

"At this time to-morrow he will be dead! His handsome face will be cold; his heart will have ceased to beat; his lips, that have so often clung to mine in passionate kisses, will be cold and white; his hand, that has so often clasped mine, will be pulseless, and his eyes hold no longer in them the light of life! No—no! he must not die—he ought not die thus—he shall not die!"

The last words the maiden uttered almost savagely, and after their utterance she became calm, excepting that she still paced the floor.

In a short while her brow lost the look of sorrow, and the eyes the frightened gaze they had worn, and in deepest thought she remained for a long time, until suddenly a flush came to her cheeks, a brightness in her eyes, and she said, with determination:

"Yes, I will save him."

Looking out of the window she saw the crowd coming from the plaza, and in their midst were the three prisoners, whom, a moment after, she saw thrust into the guard-house.

Instantly she went to the cabin, which was strongly built, had two rooms, and stood off by itself.

Before the door paced a sentinel, and upon her approach he spoke to her politely.

"Where is the Senor Salvador, Martin?"

"He is within, Nellie, putting irons on the prisoners."

"Tell him I would speak with him," said the maiden, faintly.

"Walk right in. You will find him in the room with the traitor—on the right."

Nellie slipped into the narrow passageway that divided the cabin in two parts, and just then Salvador, the keeper, came out of the door on the right, and, recognizing her, said, pleasantly:

"Well, senorita, have you come to see that I keep Senor Melville safe?"

"Yes—he must not escape; but, Salvador, can I speak with the Senor Melville?"

"Certainly; I have no orders against allowing any one to see him, and if I had they would not include you. He is in this room, as he did not care to be in the same place with the others. Walk in; I will leave the door unlocked, so when you come out lock it please, and give the key to Martin."

"I will, Salvador; but I would see this man before he dies," and Pretty Nellie stepped into the room, while the keeper passed out and joined Luis Ramirez, who just then passed the guard-house.

Paul Melville was seated upon a low cot, ironed hand and foot, and his head was cast down as the maiden entered.

Looking up as she crossed the threshold he gave a start, and said, doggedly:

"And you have come to gloat over your victim?"

"No, Paul, I came to see you ere you died," softly returned Pretty Nellie.

"Upon your head will rest my blood, girl."

"I know it—if you die."

"And die I must. Am I not doomed? and do you not know that Rafael never pardons?"

"I know that well, Paul; but you must not die."

"Girl, you talk like a fool."

"Yes, I was a fool ever to care for you, Paul Melville—to give up the regard of one who had a noble heart; but, having listened to your false avowals of love, having been to you all that I was, and having loved you, I would not now see you die," and the maiden spoke with the deepest feeling.

"And yet you deliberately said that to-day which caused me to be sentenced to death, for the dispatches I might have put aside."

"I was mad then, Paul; I have been injured by you; you saw me sink before your eyes and instead of stretching forth your hand to save me that hand was raised against me; but I did not die, and I lived to be revenged on you—"

"You have had your revenge—or will have to-morrow morning, girl," sneered the man, bitterly.

"I have it, Paul, and I now have come to save you."

The prisoner started, his face flushed, and he rose to his feet, while he said, in an earnest whisper:

"What do you mean, girl?"

"Just what I say; you must not die."

Paul Melville smiled incredulously, but the maiden continued:

"Here is a file to free yourself of your irons. I will return here, after night. In the mean time I go to concoct some plan for your escape," and unnoticing the outstretched, manacled arms Pretty Nellie turned and left the room, locking the door and giving the key to Martin, the guard.

As Pretty Nellie left the guard-house, she observed that Matt Morton and several seamen were on board the *carera*, evidently fitting her for sea, and a smile of hope crossed her beautiful face as she muttered:

"There is my chance; if the *carera* is to sail, it will doubtless be to-night. In some way I must get him on board of her; but how?"

"Senorita, the fisherman who is sick and wounded was calling you as I passed the cabin just now," said a buccaneer to the maiden, as he walked by, on his way to the beach.

Pretty Nellie was the devoted nurse of all that were sick, and on this account, added to her beauty and gentleness, had won the hearts of all on the island; but she uttered an impatient ejaculation at the news brought her by the buccaneer, and continued on her way toward the beach.

But feeling that if the sick man was calling her, he really wanted her, and knowing that he was very ill, she determined to first see the invalid, and retraced her way toward the cabin, where lay a man, a Cuban fisherman, who had been picked up a few weeks before, at sea, sick, and with a severe wound in the forehead, which he said had been given him by some buccaneers, who, after robbing him of his fish, had set him adrift in a small boat.

The wounded man had been tenderly cared for by Pretty Nellie, who felt deeply for him in his distress and loneliness.

Reaching the little cabin where the fisherman lay, the maiden cautiously stepped within, for she heard no movement, and hoped the invalid had dropped off to sleep.

But the next moment she sprang toward the cot upon which the man had lain; it was empty; but upon the floor in the corner, in a heap, lay the man, and with a little cry of alarm, Nellie attempted to raise him up; but she started back with a cry of horror, for she was in the presence of the dead.

Dropping the corpse, she would have fled from the cabin, when a sudden idea seized upon her, and raising the body she placed it upon the bed, covered it up carefully and left the hut, walking rapidly toward the beach once more.

On the way to the shore she came unexpectedly upon Captain Rafael, who bowed coldly to her, for since his return from college the two had held no conversation; he had never forgiven her for breaking her pledged word to him. Not that he had deeply loved her; but she was young and beautiful, and he was a mere youth then, and had been fascinated with her, while she, as soon as he was gone, had been won by Paul Melville.

"Captain Rafael, can I ask of you a favor?" and, her face crimson, the maiden confronted the young buccaneer.

"How can I serve you, senorita?" calmly asked Rafael.

"A short while since, the crew of the *carera* brought in a poor fisherman whom they picked up at sea, adrift in an open boat, wounded and sick; in fact, I think he will die."

"Well, senorita?" as the maiden paused.

"The *carera* is now getting ready for sea; when does she sail?"

"To-night at the turn of the tide."

"That will be about midnight?"

"Yes."

"Can I ask whither she is bound?"

"To Havana direct."

"Can this poor fisherman go in her?"

Rafael's brow darkened; then he said, quietly, "The coast fishermen have never been our enemies, and if this one is sick and in distress, I will carry him to Havana, and see that he is taken care of there until he is well. Morton shall get him accommodations in a *pulperia*, and I will give him gold to pay for it. Can I serve you in any other way, senorita?"

"No; I thank you sincerely for what you have done," and Pretty Nellie turned away, her eyes filled with tears, for it cut her to the heart to have Rafael treat her in that cold manner. Once he had been far different toward her; but that was in the olden time, before Paul Melville had crossed her path to bring a curse upon her very existence.

CHAPTER XXII.

A BOLD GAME FOR LIFE.

WHEN pretty Nellie left Captain Rafael, she wended her way rapidly down toward the

beach, arriving there just as Coxswain Morton landed from a boat, in which he was taking stores on board the *carera*.

"Good-evening, señor! I have a message for you from Captain Rafael."

"What is it, señorita?" asked the coxswain, doffing his hat; for he had long been half in love with the pretty girl.

"There was an old fisherman picked up at sea a short while since, and as he is sick and wounded, Captain Rafael says he can go in the *carera* to Havana with you."

"The captain's word is law, señorita; where is the man?"

"Up at his cabin on the hill."

"I will send for him."

"Oh, no! he is but a shadow, and Señor Martín will bring him down, and we will go out to the *carera* in my boat, for I wish to see that he is made comfortable, you know; but you must give the order to let us on board, and have a place prepared for him in the most quiet part of the vessel."

"I'll not forget, señorita; I only wish you were going along to nurse him, for, as I act as an officer on this voyage, I could find plenty of leisure to chat with you," said the gallant coxswain.

"Yes, I would like it; but I cannot now leave the island. By the way, what crew is going?" answered Nellie, first with interest, and then asking the question with perfect indifference.

"The captain told me to take half a dozen of the islanders; but word just came to me to take a score of the schooner's crew, with two or three islanders."

"Then I wish you would do me a favor, Señor Morton," and the maiden looked her very sweetest into the face of the coxswain, who answered promptly:

"You have but to name it."

"Well, Martín, you know, is considered a splendid nurse, and as I have taken a great interest in this poor fisherman, I wish you would detail Martín as one of the islanders to go with the *carera*, and allow him full care of the sick man."

"I will do it, señorita, with pleasure; I will send for him at once."

"No, I will see him as I go back by the guard-house and let him know, for he is on duty there now; then, when he comes aboard he can bring the invalid."

"Just suit your own pretty self, señorita, and you suit me. What, are you going?"

"Yes; but I must thank you for your kindness, Señor Morton. When you come again into the basin, be certain to call at the cabin and see me," and the maiden hastily departed, leaving the coxswain quite happy over the talk he had had with her.

As Nellie returned by the guard-house she stopped to speak to the sentinel, a slight tremor in her voice, for she felt that she was playing a dangerous game.

It was just sunset, and the last rays of light fell upon her face, giving it a rosy tinge.

"Señor Martín, at what time do you come off duty to-night?"

"At ten o'clock, señorita; I came on at six."

"Señor, I once heard you say that if you had the chance to leave off your present life, you would give up the sea and return to an honorable career."

"I did say so, señorita, and I meant it," said the sentinel, glancing around him.

"Señor Martín, how much money have you laid aside—that is, how much gold have you?"

The man seemed surprised; but answered:

"A thousand pesos are all I possess, and I have had to dye my hands with blood to get that much."

"Would you like to make as much again by one act?"

"If it is murder I would have to do, no; I am sick of scenes of carnage."

"No, it is to save life. I will give you one thousand pesos if you will act a part for me."

"I will do what I can for you without pay, señorita."

"No; you must take the gold. I have had many presents from the men, and I have far more than the sum named. Say you will do this for me, and I will bring your gold within the hour."

"What would you have me do, señorita?"

"I will tell you. The coxswain, Señor Matt Morton, bade me say to you that you were detailed to sail in the *carera* to-night for Havana, and to come on board with your kit."

"I am glad of this. I have been six months on the island now without a cruise," said the man, in joyous tones.

"I thought you would like it, and so I asked to have you go."

"It was very kind of you, and I thank you, señorita. Now what can I do for you?"

"When you go on board, take your gold with you—also that which I will give you."

"And why, señorita?"

"In case you should not return—in case that, when you got to Havana, you might wish to remain on shore, and take passage in some ship for the United States, you know that you would have two thousand pesos to take with you," significantly said the maiden.

"Pretty Nell, you have some deep meaning under all this. Speak out! if I cannot aid you, I will at least not betray you," said the sentinel.

"Well, when I come back here to-night, I wish to get from you the key unlocking the room in which Paul Melville is confined."

"You had it to-day; you can have it again to-night, poor girl; but he is not worthy of you."

"Of that we will not speak. When I get the key, I wish you to stand at the corner of yonder cabin, and, should you see a man with me, give no alarm."

"Oh, I see; but I would be shot in the morning for allowing him to escape."

"You forget that another guard takes your place, and that you sail at midnight."

"Yes, but upon my return—"

"You forget that you will go on shore at Havana, not to return."

"Oh, yes; liberty and two thousand pesos."

"True; but this is not all. When you are relieved, I wish you to go right aboard with your kit and gold—then return to the cabin where lies the sick fisherman."

"And why, señorita?"

"To meet me there; and more—Captain Rafael has given me permission to send the fisherman to Havana, where he says the poor man shall be taken to a *pulperia* and have every care; also, you are, so Coxswain Morton said, to be the nurse of the fisherman, taking full charge of him, and allowing no one to come near to disturb him on the voyage."

"The fisherman is wounded in the head, you know, which necessitates bandages that almost completely conceal his face, and as he is weak, you can carry him, for you are a strong man, a very strong man, Señor Martín."

"I am listening, señorita."

"Well, after your traps and gold are on board the *carera*, señor, come to the cabin yonder, and I will meet you there; then you can throw a blanket around the poor fellow, raise him in your arms, and carry him down to the boat. I will go with you on board, to see that he is made comfortable."

"And, señor, if you should think that the fisherman was rather heavy for a man who had been long ill, you need not mention it, you know, any more than you would if you saw that his illness had so changed his face as to be unrecognizable as the one who was picked up in the boat. I will be back soon with the gold, Señor Martín," and Pretty Nellie quickly disappeared.

In half an hour she was back again, a shawl around her form, and in her arms she carried a bag heavy with gold, which she placed down by the cabin.

"There is the gold, Señor Martín. When you go on board the *carera* with your traps, don't forget it, you know; now for the key, if you please."

The sentinel handed her the key, with the remark:

"This is a dangerous game, a desperate game, you are playing, señorita."

"Yes, but it is for a life," and the maiden disappeared in the cabin, and the moment after stood before Paul Melville.

"Have you freed yourself of your irons?" she abruptly asked.

"Yes, Nellie; but what is your plan?"

"I have no time to talk. Come, and neither speak nor make the slightest sound."

"I will obey; lead on."

Out of the room the two went, the maiden locking the door behind her, and then turning to her companion, she said:

"While I return this key to the guard, you go behind the cabin and await me there."

Looking out of the door, she saw through the darkness the form of the sentinel, standing at the corner of the cabin, his back turned toward them.

"That is your way; now go, and await my coming," and stepping out Nellie walked briskly toward the sentinel, while darting out of the door, Paul Melville turned in the other direction and disappeared around the corner.

"Here, señor, here is your key; in a short while you will be relieved; then go on board the *carera*, and return quickly to the cabin. For the present, *adios*."

And Pretty Nellie walked off a few steps, turned, and going behind the guard-house, was joined by Paul Melville.

"Come, we must make a *detour* to avoid seeing any one," she said, coldly, while the man murmured earnestly:

"Bless you, Nellie; you are an angel, and I a very devil to have ever deserted you."

The maiden made no reply, but led the way close in under the wooded hillside, until they reached the lonely cabin, in which lay the body of the dead fisherman.

"If you do not fear the presence of the dead, enter."

With a shudder Paul Melville stepped into the cabin, and following him closely, Nellie closed the door behind her, and bolted it; then they stood in total darkness, and no sound broke the silence but the moaning of the sea upon the rocky shore.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE GAME OF LIFE.

"PAUL MELVILLE, to-morrow you are doomed to die—do you fear to wear a dead man's clothes now?"

In spite of his courage, and he was a brave man, Paul Melville again shuddered, while he answered:

"What would you have me do, Nellie?"

"I will tell you. A fisherman was picked up at sea, some time since, in an open boat; he had been robbed, wounded and set adrift by some buccaneer vessel."

"When brought here he was very ill, and I have nursed him as carefully as I could; but to-night, with no one near him, he died, and I found him dead, lying in the corner, a little over an hour ago; he is still there."

"Hitting upon a plan for you to escape, I obtained permission to send the fisherman to Havana, in the *carera*, that sails to-night, and I have bribed a man to take care of him on the way, and to carry him on board the *carera* to-night. He will be here within the hour, and you must be the fisherman."

"But he will find out the cheat."

"No, he cannot see it through gold, and your weight he will not notice, as he is a strong man; in fact he knows that he is to play a part. Will you escape in this way?"

"Any way is preferable to death at the yard-arm. I will do anything you wish, Nellie."

"Then here; I will lead you to the body. Here it is. Put his clothes on over your own, then roll him in a blanket, and I will come back and join you; but, Paul Melville, first pledge me one thing if I aid you to escape," and the maiden spoke earnestly.

"Name it, Nellie."

"That you will never bring harm to those on this island—that you will never pilot any vessel-of-war here—swear this, Paul, by your every hope in life."

"I swear it, Nellie."

"It is well; now I will leave you for a few moments," and the maiden left the cabin, while Paul Melville turned to the dead body, emaciated by long illness, disrobed it, and pulled the rude suit on over his own clothing, after which he rolled the corpse up in a blanket, and stood awaiting the return of the maiden, his heart throbbing and brain whirling with the emotions that swept over him.

So on she returned, and lighting an oil taper, she took from beneath her shawl a false beard and wig, which she placed upon the face and head of Paul Melville, after which, with linen bandages wrapped skillfully across his forehead, she so disguised him that none would have suspected him of being other than the wounded fisherman.

"Now throw yourself there on the cot, and await my return. If any one comes while I am away feign illness, and say I will soon be back."

"But, Nellie, the body of the dead man will be found in the morning, my escape will be discovered and trouble will fall upon you," said Paul.

His words affected her deeply, and it was a moment before she could speak, for she thought: "He is not wholly selfish, as I believed; he does care for me after all."

"The body will not be found, for I was just going to carry it away and—"

"And what, Nellie?"

"And hide it from discovery."

"Nellie, let me do this—you are too frail to bear the load."

"No; I can easily carry the corpse, worn down as it has been by illness. You must remain here."

As she spoke, the maiden, yet not without a shudder, raised the body in her arms, and left the cabin.

Watching her chance she slipped into the gloom of the overhanging cliff, and as rapidly as she could, directed her steps up the glen to where a path led up the hillside.

Ascending this with considerable difficulty owing to her load, she soon came to the plateau, or top of the cliff, and turned toward the northern end of the island, where the rocky hill broke off in a precipice that overhung the sea, hundreds of feet below.

Upon the edge of this precipice she halted, and laid down her lifeless burden, while the sweat stood in great beads upon her forehead, and her breath was drawn hard and fast.

"Oh, it is horrible! yet I must do it; I must not shrink now. No, no, no! not after all I have dared."

"He is dead! Let me see if he really is dead," and the slender fingers rested upon the pulse, and then the hand was placed over the heart.

"Yes, he is dead; yet it is fearful to hurl him into the sea, and I know I will see his falling form nightly in my dreams."

"But why do I hesitate! My hesitation may lose all; I must act."

With firm-set teeth she raised the body again in her arms, and with a mighty effort harn it over the cliff; then, with a stifled cry she turned and fled from the spot.

Over the plateau she went like a frightened deer—down the steep hillside, along the path to

the cabin, until with a groan of joy, she rushed into the cabin as a place of refuge, and fell forward into the arms of Paul Melville.

"Nellie, my God! What alarms you? Are we discovered? If so, give me arms and I'll not die like a dog. Speak, Nellie, what is it?"

"Have no fear; the fright was for me, not for you. Ha! there is a step: it is Martin."

A gentle tap came upon the door, and rising, the maiden with considerable difficulty went to open it.

The sentinel, Martin, stood before her.

"I have come," he simply said.

"And your traps, and the gold?"

"Are on board the *carera*. Where is the fisherman?"

"He is here. You see that he is all bundled up for the voyage," and she pointed to the cot, upon which Paul Melville had thrown himself.

By the dim light from the taper Martin saw the form of the pretended fisherman, and crossed to the cot, where, bracing himself as though for a heavy load he raised Melville in his arms.

Instantly Nellie put out the light and quickly followed on the way down to the beach, Martin, in spite of his load, walking with a firm tread.

Without incident they reached the landing, and there Nellie's boat awaited them.

It was a light craft, built for her by some of the buccaneers, but it readily held the three who entered it, Martin seated in the stern, still holding his charge in his arms, while Nellie seized the oars and pulled rapidly for the *carera*, that lay half a cable's length from shore.

Running alongside, they were met at the gangway by two seamen; but declining assistance, Martin stepped on board still bearing his weight, and soon had the supposed wounded man in a retired bunk amidships.

"Will you remain by him for an instant?"

"Yes, Senor Martin; but I must go on shore soon," returned Nellie.

"I will be but a minute," and Paul Melville was alone, perhaps for the last time, with the woman whose happiness he had wrecked, whose life he had attempted to take, and who in return was saving him from death at the yard-arm.

"Nellie," said the man, softly, attempting to grasp her hand.

"Do not speak to me. What I have done, I have done; so let it rest," groaned the maiden, and in a dim light from the swinging lantern, some distance away, he saw her bury her face in her hands.

"Nellie, we will meet again; you will not be forgotten," he said, softly.

"Never! We must never meet again. Remember your pledged faith, Paul Melville, never to come here again. Now I must go, for here comes the Senor Martin."

"One moment. I mean we *shall* meet again. Now, Nellie, kiss me good-by."

"No; I must go."

"Nellie, if I should be discovered, dragged from here and swung up to the yard-arm, you would, when you heard of it, regret deeply that you had refused my last request. Kiss me, Nellie."

The girl stooped quickly—her lips met those of the man who had destroyed her happiness, and the next instant she was gone and Paul Melville was alone.

As Nellie ascended to the deck she met Martin and she said, faintly:

"Care for him well. Let no one go near him but yourself, and upon landing at Havana go ashore at night; take him to a *pulperia*, and there your work will have ended. Here is gold for incidental expenses. No thanks. Lead a different life, and manage in some way to send me word that all is well! *Adios! adios!*"

Dragging her hand from that of the seaman, she bounded to the gangway, and there met Matt Morton, the coxswain.

"Well, senorita, your man is aboard, Martin tells me. I hope you found his quarters pleasant."

"Indeed I did, senor, and I hope you will not allow him to be disturbed. The Senor Martin will care for him. Upon your return be certain to come and see me. By the way, Martin will give you a letter from a friend of mine in Havana. Please bring it to me. A pleasant voyage! *Buenas noches*, Senor Morton," and Nellie sprang into her light skiff, and dashed away, leaving the coxswain far more in love with her than ever before.

Arriving at the beach the maiden drew her boat up on the sand, and then crouching down behind it, prepared to await the sailing of the *carera*.

Nearly an hour passed away, and then three persons, heavily cloaked, came down upon the beach—two of them of short stature, the third tall and commanding in figure.

"Two of these are women, and with Captain Rafael! Who can they be?"

"What can all this mean? There are others plotting besides myself. Well, I have nothing to do with it, and I will keep quiet; but who those women are, and why with the Senor Rafael, I cannot understand."

As the three persons reached the shore, a boat from the *carera* met them, and the next in-

stant they were on their way out to the little vessel.

Still watching, Nellie saw the sails set on the graceful craft, the anchor hauled atrip, and the next moment, under the pressure of a light breeze, the *carera* stood across the basin, and passed from sight as she entered the rocky walls of the channel.

CHAPTER XXIV.

UNDER THE SHADOW OF EL MORO.

HAVING gained an offing from the Buccaneer Island, Captain Rafael left the deck in charge of Coxswain Morton, promoted for the time being to the second in command of the *carera*, a position that the new officer was exceedingly proud of.

"How shall I head, sir?" asked Matt Morton, as Rafael turned away.

"As you are for the present. I was just going into the cabin to consult the lady passengers regarding her desires as to where she will land."

Entering the sumptuously-furnished cabin, Captain Rafael found his fair passenger reclining upon a silken divan, her face aglow with hope, while at her side knelt the old negress, a murmur of joy escaping her lips in monotonous strain.

"Pardon my intrusion, senorita, but I come to ask if you prefer to land at your own home, or would have me carry you to Havana?" and Rafael stood politely, with uncovered head, before the beautiful girl, who replied quickly:

"Be seated, senor capitan, and we will decide between us; but, dare you enter Havana with your vessel?"

"Yes, lady, I dare go anywhere; but of course not in the garb you know me. If I run into Havana, I am a south-side planter, and this is my yacht—my name being Don Bernado Rosalia."

"I understand, senor—neither myself or my old nurse, Magdalen, would betray you, or yours, after all you have done for us. No, I shall never remember Rafael, the Rover, with kindness, nay, with friendship, and since you came to our rescue this afternoon, Magdalen has been praying to the Virgin even for your prosperity," and the maiden smiled sweetly, while Rafael said, somewhat bitterly:

"It is kind of Magdalen, for my prosperity is other people's ruin; but I am glad, senorita, to have won your blessings instead of your curses; then, if you are willing, I will carry you to Havana, running in by night, and landing under cover of the darkness, for I do not wish to attract more attention than is necessary. You have friends in Havana?"

"Yes, an uncle—General Muriel Sebastian."

"Indeed! he commands the Moro Castle," said Rafael, in some surprise.

"Yes, senor, and he is as stern as those old castle walls; but not to me, for he has been ever kind, and my mother, his sister, was the being he most loved in the world; but am I not tiring you, and also depriving you of your cabin?"

"Oh, no! not tiring me, and I have delightful quarters beyond this cabin, which is wholly at your service, and none will disturb you. Now I will return to the deck and lay our course for Havana."

"You are running a terrible risk, senor. Suppose, after all, you land me at some place on the coast."

"No, I am going to Havana anyhow, and one who leads the life I do carries Fate in his hands. There are refreshments, senorita, and if I can serve you in any way, please command me. *Buenas noches*," and Captain Rafael returned to the deck, and the *carera* was put away for Havana.

Upon the night following the departure from the island, the pretty little vessel glided swiftly in under the shadows of the Moro, and dropped anchor close in shore.

"Now, senorita, I am ready to escort you to your uncle," and Rafael again entered the cabin, where Inez Revilla and Magdalen awaited him, ready for departure.

"If you will escort me to a *volante* on shore, I can easily be driven to my uncle's," said Inez, with a pleasant smile.

"No, I consider you my *protegee*, and shall see you safely in the arms of your uncle."

"But the great risk you run, senor. Oh! do not, for my sake, place yourself in such jeopardy. Why, I go right into the walls of the Moro, where my uncle lives."

"I know; it is early and we will find him up; besides, I have long had a desire to see the interior of the Moro," said Rafael, carelessly.

Offering his arm he led the maiden on deck, and Matt Morton politely saluted him, as he asked:

"Can I send Martin ashore, sir, in a boat, with the sick fisherman?"

"Certainly; I had forgotten him. Give Martin gold to defray the expenses of the poor fellow at some *pulperia* until he recovers."

"Or dies; he is very low, sir," said the sympathizing coxswain, who felt an interest in the sick fisherman according to his regard for Pretty Nellie.

The cutter having been lowered and hauled alongside, Captain Rafael handed Inez and her

old nurse into the stern-sheets, and then called out:

"Morton, let Martin and his man go ashore with us; there is plenty of room."

Five minutes after, Martin appeared on deck, his burden in his arms, and descended into the cutter and took a seat in the bow.

Then the boat was pushed off and soon landed at a pier, when Rafael sent a seaman to call two *volantes*.

One soon arrived, and Rafael called to Inez, to escort her to it; but she drew back.

"No, senor capitan, he is suffering and should be the first cared for. Let them go in this vehicle; another will soon arrive."

"As you please, senorita. Here, my man, take your patient in this *volante*, and when you have found him quarters and made him comfortable, return to this landing and a boat will meet you."

Martin obeyed this order with alacrity, inwardly blessing the maiden for first thinking of his patient and getting him out from under the eagle eye of the young chief, for he was in constant dread of discovery, and the nearer he drew to safety the more nervous he became.

As for Paul Melville, he was perfectly calm. If it came to the worst, he could raise the alarm, declare that Rafael the Rover was there, and he could soon prove that he was a commissioned officer in the navy of the United States.

But unsuspecting that Paul Melville was even alive, Rafael of course had no suspicion of who was at his very side, and aided Martin and his charge into the *volante*.

"*Gracias, senor, gracias, senor capitan*," said Paul Melville, in a faint voice, to Rafael, and in perfect Spanish.

A moment after the *volante* wheeled rapidly away, as a second one dashed up, and drew rein near the boat.

Into this vehicle Rafael helped the Senorita Inez and Magdalen, and then sprang in himself.

"To the Moro—the commandant's quarters," he said to the driver, and the heavy carriage rumbled along the streets on its way to the gun-guarded fortress.

A short drive and the vehicle was admitted through the massive gateway, and drew rein in front of the quarters of the commandant.

"Now, senor, you will leave me here?" pleaded Inez, grasping the hand of the buccaneer.

"No, I will give you into the charge of your uncle, senorita."

Before the maiden could reply, an officer stood by the side of the vehicle.

"I would see General Sebastian, senor; I have his niece, the Senorita Revilla, with me."

"Certainly, senor; he will most gladly welcome you, for the mysterious disappearance of the senorita has pained him deeply. Your name, senor, and I will announce you."

"Don Bernado Rosalia."

"Si, senor," and the officer disappeared to return the next instant, accompanied by a distinguished-looking man in the full uniform of a Spanish general, and with a glad cry the maiden found herself clasped in her uncle's arms.

"Ah, *cara mia*, I welcome you again and again! I believed you forever lost to me; but tell me, where have you been, and to whom do we owe your rescue?"

"Uncle, this is the gentleman to whom I owe so much—Don Bernado Rosalia. He it was who saved me from that wretched buccaneer, Luis Ramirez."

"Ha! it is as I have heard—Luis Ramirez is then a corsair?"

"But, senor, pardon me, if, in the joy of my niece's return, I have seemed to slight you—it was unintentional, senor, I assure you, and you must now come in and have wine with me; but how is it you rescued Inez?—pray tell me."

"There is an island, senor general, near my home, where I often hunt; it is sometimes occupied by buccaneers, and it was there that Ramirez took the senorita, and held her in imprisonment, while he was on a cruise, hoping, upon his return, that she would be forced to marry him; but my visiting the island broke up his little plans, as I found there the senorita and brought her home—that is the whole story, senor general."

"And I have to thank you, senor, more than I can ever express; but if you will not accept my hospitalities while in Havana, you must take wine with me. Here, Pedro, bring wine and glasses," and the general called to a servant, while he continued:

"At what hotel will you stop, senor, for I would do myself the honor of a call upon you?"

"I shall remain upon my *carera*, senor. If I do not sail with the morning tide, it will give me pleasure to see you, and the senorita, on board to-morrow. The lady Inez knows my vessel well, and can see if I have gone, for we are anchored near here."

"We will certainly come if you are in port. Now, senor, I drink your very good health, and to our better acquaintance."

The toast was drank, and Rafael said, quietly:

"And now, senorita, to your future happiness."

Inez Revilla bowed low, and a blush came

over her cheeks, which, the moment after, were pale, for each instant she dreaded that her brave preserver would be found out in his real character.

But, without discovery, Rafael bade *adios* to his fair passenger and the commandant, and springing into the *volante*, was soon at the landing once more.

"Has Martin returned, coxswain?" he asked, of the man in charge of the boat.

"No, senor; but the *volante* driver brought you this note," and the seaman handed a missive to Rafael, not thinking it worth while to say anything about a letter he had to deliver to Matt Morton, and which he had received from the driver of the *volante*.

"I will read it when I get on board; pull for the *carera*."

Arriving at the vessel, the buccaneer chief entered the cabin and glanced at the note. It ran as follows:

"SEÑOR CAPITAN:

"Desirous of leading a new life, and conscience-stricken at my past career of crime, I have determined not to return on board the *carera*."

"It will be useless to search for me, as I will not be found."

"The wounded fisherman I left in comfortable quarters, and those caring for him will be liberally rewarded."

"Now, capitan, I bid you *adios*, with every wish for your welfare, for you have ever been toward me a kind and noble commander."

"Your servant,

"ED MARTIN."

"P. S. You may rest assured that I will not betray you or my comrades. I shall know nothing of the *carera* or her movements."

E. M."

"Well, if he keeps his good resolutions I will not regret that he is gone; but I must put at once to sea, for he may betray me. I can land on the coast somewhere, and come from thence back to Havana. Mr. Morton."

"Ay, ay, sir!" rung out Matt Morton, who, when called by his captain, had just finished reading by the binnacle light, the address upon a sealed letter, handed him slyly by the boat's coxswain, when he came on board.

The letter was addressed as follows:

"TO THE SENORITA NELLIE."

"Kindness,

"Acting Lieutenant,

"MATT MORTON."

It was the "acting lieutenant" that particularly pleased the officer, and putting the letter away in his pocket, he descended into the cabin.

"Morton, up with the anchor, and we will put at once to sea."

"But the seaman, sir—Martin?"

"Will remain for the present in Havana."

"Ay, ay, sir!" and ten minutes after the *carera* was gliding seaward, while a pair of dark eyes, dimmed with tears, were watching her flight from a window in the gloomy Moro's walls, and murmuring a prayer for the man who had saved her from the terrible fate that had threatened her.

"He is gone! Will I never see him more?" and with a deep sigh Inez Revilla turned sadly away from the window, an aching void in her heart.

CHAPTER XXV.

A STRANGE MOVE.

THOUGH Captain Rafael was perhaps right, in not feeling perfect confidence in the word of Martin, not to betray him, he would certainly have felt sorry to have doubted him, had he caught sight of the deserter a few moments after he had dispatched the letter to his commander, and known what was passing in the thoughts of the honest fellow.

Upon entering the *volante* Martin had given orders to drive to a certain *pulperia*, where sailors congregated when in port; but as soon as they had gone a square he changed the order, at the suggestion of Paul Melville, and they were put down at the side door of the Cuban host, Pedro Nunez, who upon seeing a vehicle drive up hastily came out to receive its occupants.

"Welcome, senores, welcome; you desire rooms doubtless?"

Having thrown aside his wig, beard, bandages and suit of fisherman attire, Paul Melville sprang out in his proper attire, and said gayly, for he no longer felt himself under the dread of the gallows:

"Ah, Senor Nunez, I see that you do not know me. I did leave you rather unceremoniously, a short while since, but I have returned, you see. I suppose you have my traps safe?"

"Ah, *santissima*! I know you now, senor. I feared you had been dealt foully with; but I am glad to see you back. Yes, your baggage is in the room I had prepared for you. This is a—one of your men, I suppose?" and Pedro glanced at the seaman's suit worn by Ed Martin.

"No, he is my friend, and I will go at once to my room, and this gentleman needs one, too—next to mine—and, Senor Nunez, we do not wish any one to know of our arrival here—you understand?"

"Perfectly, senor; your wish is my law; your quarters shall be safe and comfortable."

"Thank you; now bid the driver to wait, if he would have double fare," and Paul Melville and Martin followed the host into the house, where they were shown to comfortable quarters in a retired wing of the house.

"Well, I shall rest here for a day or two without leaving my room, for I have had little rest of late, as you know, Martin; but first, let me write a few lines to that noble girl, and I will inclose them in the letter you say you intend sending."

Calling for writing materials the two men sat down, and while both of them wrote to Nellie, Martin also inscribed a note to Captain Rafael, the same which the reader has already heard read.

His note to Nellie was as follows:

"In safety I reached here with the poor fisherman, who bore the voyage exceedingly well, and we are both located in a *pulperia* where every attention will be shown us."

"Need I say that I thank you for giving me the means to escape and lead a different life?"

"I think you will believe me when I say that I will not again commit crime, and through my life shall bless you as the guardian angel of the better career that is open before me."

There was no signature, and yet Martin knew that Nellie would recognize the writer, though she had never seen his writing.

In the mean time Paul Melville wrote to the maiden, and in such a way as not to arouse suspicion if the letter were seen by other eyes than those for which it was intended.

These missives were then placed in the hands of the driver of the *volante*, along with a handful of pesos, and instructions to deliver them to the coxswain of the boat, who in turn was to hand them to Matt Morton.

The driver was also requested, by a liberal bribe, not to make known, if asked where he had driven his passengers.

After partaking of a hearty supper washed down with rare old Spanish wine, Paul Melville retired for the night, while Martin went down into the saloon of the hotel.

As he took a seat at one of the tables he saw four seamen, whose conversation soon made known to him that they belonged to the American sloop-of-war Sea Hawk, and his face paled, for there flashed across his mind the substance of a conversation he had overheard between the old buccaneer chief and Captain Rafael, for, upon the arrival of the schooner in the basin, he was engaged upon some work just outside of the head-quarters cabin.

"*Nombre de Dios!*" he exclaimed, half-aloud, "I must protect Captain Rafael or he will fall into a trap. I remember, he told the old chief, he intended going on the Sea Hawk, and representing himself as Lieutenant Paul Melville."

"Now all this was well enough if the lieutenant was out of the way, and would be now if he had been hung, as sentenced, at the yard-arm; but with that officer now in Havana, and ready to go upon the Sea Hawk as soon as he gets a little rest, it will be a bad thing for the captain to go aboard to impersonate a man who may appear at any moment. This must not be, and I will go at once down to the landing, see Captain Rafael, and tell him, to my surprise, I found that the supposed fisherman was none other than Paul Melville."

"I will also, not to get that noble girl in trouble, tell him that the lieutenant had bribed the guard to let him escape, and that same guard had said Pretty Nellie was sending the wounded fisherman to Havana, and that they had thrown the poor devil from the cliff, dressed the officer up in his clothes, and thus left him in the cabin, deceiving both the maiden and myself. This I will say Melville told me, and the result will be that those two fellows, Salvador and Merdito will be executed; but they are bad men anyhow, and it will little matter so I save the girl from suspicion."

"Yes, I will go and tell this story, and say that the lieutenant went at once on board the Sea Hawk, and this will save the captain—but sainted Virgin! if he should hold me! No, he will not do that. At any rate I will risk it."

Quickly leaving the saloon, Martin walked rapidly toward the landing, off which the *carera* had anchored; but he was too late, for the little vessel was dimly visible in the distance going seaward.

"Too bad! The *carera* has gone back to the island, and Captain Rafael has remained in town to carry out his foolhardy idea of going on board the Sea Hawk as Paul Melville. Well, what can I do?"

"If I place myself on the pier opposite the vessel-of-war I may be recognized by some one as a buccaneer, and may not, after all, see the captain. Ah! I have it! I will prevent Paul Melville from going out until after the Sea Hawk has sailed."

"But how? There's the rub; but I will do it, if I have to—" here there came an angry light in his eyes, and he continued, almost savagely: "He is a traitor anyhow, and I will not trust him, while Captain Rafael twice saved my life. Yes, if one of them must be sacrificed, it shall not be the captain."

Having made up his mind upon this point Martin returned rapidly toward the *pulperia*, and finding the four American seamen still

drinking in the saloon, he called for wine and asked them to drink with him, an invitation they readily accepted, for they were already "half-seas over."

From these sailors he learned that the Sea Hawk expected to sail in a very few days, going on a cruise, they believed, among the islands, but of that they were not certain.

Martin also heard of the chase and sinking of the Curse of the Sea told over and over again by the seamen, who little knew that their listener could tell them a very different story did he desire, and was at the time thinking that they would soon, perhaps, have that very Rafael the Rover, whom they believed at the bottom of the sea, an officer over them, and proudly treading the quarter-deck of the Sea Hawk; but he wisely held his peace, and having gained all the information he could he bade his new acquaintances good-night and retired to his room, meditating deeply upon some plan to keep Paul Melville from going on board the Sea Hawk.

Determined to find out the views of the lieutenant regarding Captain Rafael, Martin entered his room and found the officer lying at full length upon a divan, smoking a cigar and lost in thought.

"Come in, *amigo*. Have you been off after a flirtation with some of these dark-faced senoritas?"

"I've been looking around, senor, and I have been thinking of a little plot that perhaps you can aid me in."

"Speak out, *amigo*—I owe you my life, and I'll do all I can, you may rest assured."

"Well, sir, you know that Captain Rafael came to us in the *carera*?"

"Yes, and I've been thinking that it would be a good plan to entrap him. He kidnapped me, you know, and I nearly lost my life by it, so I will see that he is taken and he will be broken on the wheel, or garoted," and Paul Melville's eyes flashed with determined hatred.

"That is just it, senor. There is a big price offered for Rafael's head, dead or alive, and we might as well handle the gold, and I can arrange it easily."

"Then we will do it, Martin. Now to your plan."

"Well, senor, you say you are not going to leave here for a day or two?"

"Yes, I'll remain housed several days, resting, and then go on board the sloop-of-war to which I am ordered."

"Shall I go aboard, senor, to let them know you are here? I would like a chance to enlist, you know."

"You can easily do that. I will see to it; but I will not let my captain know I am here until I go on board. Now to your plan?"

"It is this, senor; I know the *pulperia* where the chief will put up, and I can go there to-morrow, find out his room, and lay my plans, so that to-morrow night we can go together, with several guards, and capture him."

"The very plan! You are a good plotter, and I will leave it in your hands."

The buccaneer said no more, but rising, bade Paul Melville good-night, and sought his own room, which adjoined that of the young officer.

The following day he was up at an early hour, and was busy until late in the afternoon arranging some plan for the night, and at a late hour sought Paul Melville in his room.

"I am ready, senor; the guards await us at the *pulperia*, and Captain Rafael is there, wholly unsuspecting. By the time we arrive it will be midnight, so you had better get ready."

"I will be with you in a moment, my fine fellow. Now, here I am," and the two left the house together and sprang into a *volante* awaiting in front of the door.

After quite a long drive they got out in front of a rude tavern, or *pulperia*, in one of the lowest, dingiest streets in Havana, and were at once ushered into a door on the side by the *pulpero*, who met them.

Within the narrow, dark hallway, stood two men in uniform, and Martin introduced them as the guard.

"We have a Tartar to catch, my men; I hope you are well prepared," said Paul Melville.

"*Si, senor*; we are ready for any emergency," replied one of the men.

Going along a narrow, dingy hallway, the five men, for the *pulpero* accompanied them, leading the way, ascended several rickety stairways, and knocked at a low door.

"Come in!" replied a voice within.

"Enter first, senor," said Martin, and Paul Melville raised the latch and crossed the threshold.

It was a pleasant room inside, and neatly furnished, with bed, easy-chair and table, upon which a lamp burned brightly.

At the table sat a man who arose as the party entered.

"We would see El Capitan Rafael," said Paul Melville, failing to recognize a dark-bearded, large man who confronted him.

As quick as a flash of light the man pointed the muzzle of a pistol in the face of Paul Melville, while he hissed forth:

"Senor, you are my prisoner. If you resist I will kill you."

Paul Melville saw that the man was in earnest,

and furthermore beheld the *pulpero* also holding a pistol at his head, while the two guards held Martin in *durance vile*, and with a bitter imprecation he said:

"I surrender; what is your intention with us?"

"Not to harm you, unless you intend to escape; but to hold you prisoner until Rafael's *carera* leaves the harbor. You see the buccaneer captain is merciful," replied the man whom they had found in the room.

"Yes, he is very merciful," and then turning to Martin he said in English:

"We're in a trap. I hope he tells the truth when he says he will release us when the *carera* sails."

"I hope so, *senor*," said Martin in desponding tones.

"Here, no conversation between you. Remove that man to the other room, and place the guard at his door," sternly commanded the one who seemed to be the leader of the party.

"Come, sir," and Martin was dragged from the room and Paul Melville was left alone, after the *pulpero* had told him he should be furnished with meals and all that he desired to pay for.

As the door closed the *pulpero* locked it securely and placed the key in his pocket, after which he ordered one of the guards to take his stand outside.

Then the other guard, the leader and *pulpero*, with Martin, went into another room near by, when the seaman no longer appeared to be a prisoner, as he turned to his companions and said:

"Senors, that was well executed, and I thank you. The *pulpero* will give you the gold agreed upon between us, and your duties as sentinels will only last a few days; *buenas noches*, *comrades*."

The guard and his companion at once left the room, leaving the *pulpero* alone with the seaman.

"Senor, you remember my instructions—to hold him prisoner until the American vessel-of-war sails?"

"Yes."

"Then to drive him, by night, outside the city walls and leave him?"

"Si, *senor*."

"Bueno! Now here is your gold—one hundred pesos for yourself, and fifty apiece for your three comrades; is this all right, *senor*?"

"Si, *senor*."

"Then I will bid you good-night. When you see Captain Rafael again tell him how one Martin saved his life."

"I will, *senor*. I owe *el capitan* much. He has been good to me, and I would serve him without the gold."

"No, you run a risk, and you deserve to be paid for it; but I advise you to disguise the front of your house, if you can, and when you carry the lieutenant out, do so by another door, and do not forget to tell him you know nothing of me."

"I will, *gracias*, *senor*."

With a wave of his hand, Martin left the *pulperia*, muttering to himself:

"Well, I have saved the captain, and saved myself the blood of that traitor on my hands; besides, if we should meet again, he will believe that I had nothing to do with it, and I can trump up a good story of how I was carried off for several days to sea; and the best of it is, the money I paid out is what was given me to defray the expenses of the poor fisherman! Ha! ha! ha! Ed Martin, you are a deep schemer; but you must now become an honest man; so here goes for other quarters until I decide upon what my future course will be. Why I may yet return home with honor, and be sent to represent the people in Congress!" and with a chuckle, Edward Martin, ex-buccaneer, walked briskly along the deserted street, at peace with himself and the world in general.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A MYSTERY UNSOLVED.

Now that my kind reader can more fully understand how it was that Paul Melville, a lieutenant in the United States Navy, became so suddenly metamorphosed into the famous buccaneer, Rafael the Rover, and why he was betrayed by Luis Ramirez, the second officer of the *Curse of the Coast*, who had sworn revenge against his young chief, I will proceed with my story, taking up the threads where they have been broken; but first let me explain that, instead of having deserted the island, as was believed by the Americans, the buccaneers had simply sought a refuge in the many caves with which the hills abounded, and the schooner and her crew had gone around to the lee of the island to lay concealed until after the expected visit, or until they were needed, while the *carera* and small boats had been hauled into coves whose existence would never be suspected by those unacquainted with the peculiarities of the *isla*.

Had it been the intention of Rafael to divide the crew of the *Sea Hawk* into separate parties, and thus have his comrades attack them, he could easily have done so, with every show of success, for the buccaneers lay on their arms in the caverns awaiting some signal of attack, and

were greatly surprised that the sloop-of-war set sail without a combat; but they trusted in their young commander, whom all there knew to be on board the American vessel, and felt that some pressure he could not avoid caused him to act as he did.

When the *Sea Hawk*, after leaving the basin, cruised around the island, to the spot where the schooner had been seen at anchor, with the crew on shore, signals were at once given from the highest cliffs to those on the *Curse of the Sea*, who were thus guided how to head, and of the whereabouts of the *Sea Hawk*, and that a landing had been made upon the island under the lee of the precipice.

This latter signal Roy Woodbridge did not get in time to prevent his coming close in shore, yet his men were at the guns and prepared for an attack if the boats came upon them; but, as the reader will remember, this attack was not made, owing to the most mysterious and sudden disappearance of Bancroft Edmunds, without whom Midshipman Ramsey dare not give the order to move upon the passing vessel.

When night came on and the storm broke, the look-outs could no longer signal the schooner, and the two vessels came in close vicinity to each other, until, to escape, the buccaneer ran for the basin, and yet did not enter it, but luffing up quickly around a high wall of reef, hauling in sail, and letting fall his anchor, he rode out the gale in comparative safety, while the crew of the *Sea Hawk*, seeing him disappear, believed he had gone down; but with quiet satisfaction the buccaneers, after their dangerous maneuver, saw the vessel-of-war dash by like a mad racer and disappear in the channel through the rocks, and as soon as the storm abated sufficiently the *Curse of the Coast* again put to sea.

When the *Sea Hawk* had anchored the second time in the basin, it will be remembered that a dark form glided out of the fore-castle hatch and disappeared over the bows into the water, to return, after an absence of some time, the same way, and without having attracted the attention of any of the tired watch who held the deck.

This man was Rafael the Rover, who, letting himself down into the water, swam silently shoreward, and was soon upon the deserted beach.

With quick step he walked through the deserted hamlet, and coming to a tree that grew close against the cliff, he ascended it with ease for the distance of thirty feet, and then gave a loud, shrill whistle.

"Ay, ay—who is it?" asked a bluff voice from the shadow of the cliff, and directly opposite the spot where Rafael stood on the tree.

"It is I, guard—Rafael."

"Ay, ay, sir—in one minute," and there was a grating sound, and a dark object protruded from a rocky shelf, and the end rested upon the limb of the tree that supported the buccaneer.

It was a plank bridge, and Rafael quickly crossed it and found himself upon a broad shelf of rock that wound around the cliff for a short distance to a crevice, at which stood a sentinel.

"My father is in the cabin, *Pedrez*?"

"Yes, *senor capitan*; but, sainted Virgin! how splendidly you brought the sloop in through the gale," exclaimed the buccaneer guard, admiringly.

"Thanks to the aid of Mad Maud, *Pedrez*."

"Yes, *senor*, her woman's wit prompted her to light the beacon, when none of us men thought of it; but you handled the large craft well, sir."

"And so did Woodbridge the schooner. I am glad to see you on the alert, *Pedrez*," and Rafael turned into the fissure in the rock, and after a few steps came to a large cavern, the entrance of which was lighted by a dim lantern.

Entering, he found himself in a large, vaulted chamber, the dome of which sparkled back a thousand jets of light from the score of lanterns that set around on rocky shelves.

Grouped about the large cavern chamber were a number of women and children, and some half a dozen men, the latter either wounded or invalids; the remainder of the buccaneers were on duty elsewhere, lying in ambush to attack their foes if the signal should be given.

As Rafael passed through the cavern the crowd sprang to their feet and saluted him—a salute he hurriedly returned and then passed on through an arched doorway, which led him into another cavern—the quarters of the old chief.

Reclining upon a cot, and with every appearance of making himself comfortable, the old chief was half asleep when Rafael entered; but his step awakened him, and he arose quickly, while his face lighted with pleasure.

"Well, boy, you are come—is he in your power?"

"He is on his vessel, and that is anchored in the basin. The gale was so severe it drove me in for safety, sir."

"You did well, and to-morrow we will entrap them; but why in the fiend's name did you not give the signal of attack to-day?"

"Father, the sloop has two hundred men. Over a hundred were ashore to-day, while you had but sixty men with which to attack them. If you failed, all was lost, and they could have

sent seventy-five more men ashore to aid those on the island, so I decided upon another plan—"

"Name it."

"It is to haunt the vicinity for several days, and then anchor the *Sea Hawk* off the island, and get Captain Markham to come on shore with me in the cutter, under pretense of teaching him the channel; then you can easily take him, and me with him—"

"By Heaven! a good plan! Once let me get him into my power and I haul down the black flag with its red anchor of hope—my hope shall be then a reality—a blood-red realization. Oh God! the glad joy I will feel when that man is face to face with me," and the old man placed his hand quickly upon his side, while his face became deadly pale.

"Ah, I must be careful, or my joy at the hope of revenge will kill me; it will cause this accursed wound to break out. Well, boy, go on; I am listening."

"I have little more to say, sir, except that I am sorry Mad Maud showed herself to-day; but fortunately she gave no sign that would betray us."

"Yes, I was in terrible suspense when I was told she met the seamen upon the beach; but she does strange things, you know, and must be humored. Thank Heaven she lit the Pilot Beacon to-night; otherwise you could not have gotten in, could you?"

"Perhaps not, sir; the danger was great as it was; but, father, I would like to ask your motive in having the American lieutenant seized to-day?"

"I do not understand you, Rafael."

"Lieutenant Bancroft Edmunds, who commanded the force that landed on the lee of the island, disappeared most mysteriously, and all search for him proving useless, I of course thought you had ordered him captured, and—"

"I did nothing of the kind. Of course I knew of the landing, and saw the men searching the rocks; but I did not know that any of the party were missing."

Rafael gazed fixedly into the face of the old man, and read there no desire to deceive him. He must look elsewhere for the mystery attending the disappearance of Bancroft Edmunds, and he answered:

"Then it must be as was believed aboard ship—that he fell from some rock and was drowned; but I wish you would have inquiries made, sir, regarding the young officer; he is a fine fellow, and I should dislike harm to befall him. Now I must return, and rest assured, in some good way, I shall bring this life we lead to a speedy termination."

"I believe you, boy; but it can end only when my revenge is complete. Be careful that you are not seen returning, and do have a care that you are not suspected and at once running up to the yard-arm of the sloop. By the very man against whom we seek revenge—curses rest upon him! I will have search made for the missing lieutenant. But, Rafael, I suppose you are ignorant of the fact that the prisoner escaped?"

"What prisoner, father? There were three doomed, you know?"

"Yes—the thief and the mutineer were shown as ordered—"

"And Paul Melville escaped?" asked Rafael earnestly.

"He certainly did. When Salvador went to bring him out for execution he was gone."

"And the guard?"

"I ordered him shot, but countermanded the order when I knew that one other, who had sailed in the *carera*, had been on duty up to ten o'clock—I refer to Martin."

"*Maldita!* that very fellow deserted in Havana. He was evidently bribed to aid him, and deserted to avoid the death he knew he would suffer for his act."

"And the traitor doubtless sailed with you."

"No, sir; every man on board the *carera* I could trust; but has the island been thoroughly searched?"

"Thoroughly—every cavern and brush—there was a boat missing, a fishing skiff, and he doubtless fled in that; the weather was good and he could easily gain the nearest land; but, never mind now; you must hasten back."

"Yes, and if Paul Melville is not dead I must have care that he does not outwit me. He may have reached Havana and come up on some other American cruiser; but now I must say *adieu*."

Grasping his father's hand Rafael left the cavern and returning through the large vaulted chamber said a few pleasant words to those assembled there, after which, by the same route he had come, he retraced his way to the beach.

Suddenly a form confronted him. It was Mad Maud.

"I have to thank you, Maud, for doing me another great service—in lighting the Pilot Beacon," said Rafael, kindly.

"It was as dark as perdition, and the sea was all chaos—I knew that both you and the schooner must need help; but the girl, what of her?"

"I saw her safely to her uncle in Havana—"

"Sh! I meant not her—the one on ship-board," impatiently said the woman.

"You refer to Miss Markham; she is well, and

spoke most kindly of you to-day. She is a noble woman!" said Rafael, earnestly.

"Of course she is—a true woman. Would that my poor girl could have been so too! but I must not think of her now," said the woman, sadly, and then she abruptly added:

"Captain Rafael, you went on board that vessel on account of Mabel Markham—you love her."

Had the darkness not prevented, Mad Maud would have seen that her words struck home, for the man's face flushed crimson; but, before he could reply, she went on:

"From those on the schooner I learned of the capture of the Sunbeam—your release of the vessel because that girl was on board, and your cutting down one who would have fought for beauty and booty—yes, yes, you went on the Sea Hawk on her account, and you must have care that she does not see you dangling to the yard-arm of her father's vessel—a sad sight for her beautiful eyes, a sad blow to her heart, for, Captain Rafael, that girl loves you."

"Nonsense, Maud; she hardly knows me."

"She loves Rafael the Rover, not Paul Melville. I am a woman and can read a woman's heart. Did I not hold converse with her to-day? Was she not nervous all the time, fearing that the schooner would be captured here?"

"I tell you, she loves you, not as Paul Melville, but as Rafael the Rover, and she will yet prove that love, for my mad eyes can see far into the future, and I see sorrow and danger ahead for you, proud buccaneer."

"Well, Maud, whatever comes I will meet it. Now I must say farewell. But, stay; do you know aught of a lieutenant from the sloop, who disappeared mysteriously to-day?"

"No; was one lost?"

"Yes, when he went ashore with a searching-party. See if you can learn anything regarding him, and if he is not dead let no harm befall him."

"Rafael, go not again on that vessel! You are free now; beware!" said Mad Maud, imperiously.

"I do not dread any danger that I cannot meet, Maud; but I thank you for your interest in me. Adios."

Entering the water, Rafael the Rover quietly struck out for the Sea Hawk, which, as is already known, he gained in safety.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A MYSTERY SOLVED.

WHEN Lieutenant Bancroft Edmunds went off alone for a quiet search of the rocks, leaving his men on the beach, he little knew to what that expedition would lead him.

By a careful inspection of the ragged front of a low cliff he thought that he could gain a foothold sufficient to crawl to the shelf above, and there reach a position for further reconnaissance.

At once he determined to at last make the experiment, and by hard work, and after considerable danger, he accomplished the difficult feat and stood upon the shelf, forty feet above the place from which he had started.

But, from the shelf he could not see his men, and hence could not call them to his aid, should he need assistance, and nothing daunted he concluded to go it alone.

But a few steps along the edge of the shelf proved to him that he was in a bad situation for other discoveries, for there were no means of going any further unless he leaped across to a mighty boulder—a distance of some twelve feet.

Once on that boulder he could see that he could easily evade the rocky cliff, and, perhaps, by climbs such as he had already accomplished, gain the interior of the pirate isle.

But the leap was one that was hazardous in the extreme—for the opposite boulder was not flat, but rounded, sloping down toward the side fronting him, and twelve feet was no small jump, with only a few paces run to give him impetus.

Still he was brave to recklessness and determined to make the attempt, and glanced down into the crevice between the two rocks to see where he would alight if he failed to clear the distance.

"I'll catch a plane in the water; but it runs like a mill race," he muttered, as he saw the sea pouring through the narrow opening and rushing into the interior of the island.

"Then I don't like that moss on the boulder—it may be of light growth, and slip under my feet," he continued, as he saw that the top of the rock on the other side of the chasm was covered with a soft moss.

"But risk nothing, gain nothing, so here go!"

Stepping back as far as he could he gave several quick steps and took the bound.

A moment he was poised in air, and then came down upon the boulder; but, as his feet struck the treacherous carpeting of moss it gave away instantly, and he fell heavily, and ere he could save himself, slid into the dark waters, forty feet below.

Down, down he sunk, until he believed there was a current carrying him under, and gave himself up for lost; but a bold swimmer he put

out all his strength, checked his downward flight, and rose slowly to the surface just as his breath was nearly gone.

An upward glance showed him that the swift current had carried him far from the place where he had taken the plunge, for above his head towered rocky walls a hundred feet in height, while he was urged along at an astonishingly rapid rate.

"I am going landward, and not seaward, thank Heaven!" he muttered, coolly, and then he glanced ahead to see where the winding stream was carrying him.

On, on, he went for some five minutes, and then he drifted out of the channel into a little basin, with sandy beach and wooded hillsides.

By an effort he reached the shore, for he saw that the outlet to the basin was through just such a channel as the one by which he had entered, and he did not doubt but that it led out to sea again, or into some subterranean cavern, which he had no immediate desire to explore.

"Well, this is a most secluded spot. I wonder if I can ever find my way out, or failing in that, if the crew can find me here!"

"Why a thousand buccaneers could hide away here, and a whole fleet surrounding and exploring the island be none the wiser. I have made a great discovery."

"And one that may cost you dear."

Bancroft Edmunds started and turned quickly, his hand upon his pistol, although he well knew it would be of no service to him after his ducking.

Before him, just by the side of a large rock, stood a young and beautiful girl, clothed rather fancifully, yet in a becoming manner, and in her hand she held a pistol, gold-mounted and long-barreled, which she pointed directly at him, while a look of determination upon her red pouting lips proved that she would use the weapon if necessary.

"Have I struck a Paradise, that I find an angel here?" said Bancroft, with gallantry, turning his admiring gaze upon the maiden, and not on the threatening muzzle staring him in the face.

"You have struck a shoal that may wreck you, senor," replied the maiden, in tones so serious that they could not but impress the listener; but he returned, in the same light tone he had just used:

"There can certainly be no danger near one so beautiful."

"You may find to the contrary, senor. You are my prisoner!"

"I yield me with the sweetest grace. I was captive ere you spoke the words."

"Senor, you need not jest. I repeat you are my prisoner. Had you been captured by those in call of my voice your life would have at once been the forfeit. I want not your life on my hands, senor; but if you attempt to escape me, I will shoot you down as I would a dog."

Bancroft Edmunds now felt that he was in the greatest danger, for he knew that the maiden, from her words, was one of the buccaneer band, who, after all, had not left the island, but were secreted somewhere in the interior, access to which was known only to themselves.

Still, in his danger, he could not but admire the cool pluck of his fair captor, and he said:

"I have already told you, fair girl, that I yield myself your prisoner, for, were my pistol of use, I would not use it against a woman, even to save my life."

"My sword I have here, and if I meet one of my own sex, I do not hesitate to say that I will not tamely submit."

"But you must. You are in the lion's den. There is no chance for your retreat, except by the channel you came, and you cannot return that way until the tide changes—three hours from now."

"I have comrades near at hand, and—"

"You deceive yourself; you are half a mile from where you left your comrades, and they will never be able to follow you, except they come as you did, and I do not think that they will venture that."

"How know you the way I came?"

"I guess at it. You were exploring, slipped into the stream between those rocky walls, and the current brought you here. I was reading yonder, and when I saw you round the curve, I was greatly startled, fearing others followed you; but I now know that it must have been accident that brought you."

"I will tell you frankly—it was accident that brought me by the way that I came; but tell me, fair girl, how can I leave this spot? for one with your face cannot be cruel enough to bring upon me—"

"Who?" as Bancroft paused.

"The buccaneers!"

"You are right. I belong to their band. In a short while I could call many men to my aid; it is useless for you to think of escape."

"Except with your aid."

"That you shall not have—at least not now. As I told you, I want not your life on my hands; but you are dangerous if free, and I must hold you until the danger is past."

"If the buccaneers behold you, your life will end at once, and I do not wish that—ah, no! I have had enough of bloodshed."

"Promise me that you will make no effort to

escape—swear it to me, upon your honor as an officer and a gentleman, that you will remain here until my return, and I will go and prepare a hiding-place for you."

"Will you return alone?"

"Ah! I see that you doubt me; but I do not wonder, when my own lips have told you that I was a girl buccaneer."

"Pardon me; I will not doubt you. I will await you here."

"No, behind yonder rock; lie down there and you will be safe. I will go and place provisions in a secure retreat I have only lately found; none on the island know of its existence, and there you will be safe, and I will bring you food, until opportunity offers to let you go free. Do you trust me?"

"Yes. You are a noble girl. I will be guided by you in everything, for one so beautiful and innocent-looking cannot be evil at heart."

The maiden blushed and turned quickly away, and disappeared in the bushes growing on the hillside, while Bancroft Edmunds threw himself down at full length between the rocks, and lay musing upon the strange adventure he had met with.

In a little more than an hour the maiden returned, and bidding her prisoner, for he was nothing else, follow her, she led the way up the steep hillside, by out-of-the-way paths, for the distance perhaps of two miles, and then halted in front of a vine-clad cliff—the same which had been pointed out to Rafael by Mad Maud.

Pulling the swaying vines one side, she pointed to the narrow crevice and motioned to her companion to enter, which he quickly did, and was the next moment followed by her.

"Well, this is a secure retreat indeed," said Bancroft, as he saw the little cabin, and the high walls around it.

"Yes; I found it by following a pretty little track from the beach up into these hills. The entrance through the vines would have escaped me then, had I not caught sight of a silk kerchief hanging on the briars, and a close search discovered this place. Here you will be secure, and here are provisions for several days."

"And here you will leave me?"

"Yes; but you must make me a promise—nay, swear to me that you will not leave this place unless I lead you from it. On that alone your life depends."

"How long must I remain?"

"That depends upon circumstances—until I can arrange a plan for your escape from the island. Now I will leave you, and go and see the result of the chase. There is a spring of water against the rock, and here are a cot, table and chairs, and also books. I will return to-morrow, and tell you about the sloop-of-war and schooner. Remember your oath, senor; adios."

"Hold! tell me your name, please, fair girl!"

"I am called by the buccaneers Pretty Nellie," and the maiden disappeared from the sight of the young officer, who was left alone with his not very pleasant meditations.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SAVED BY A POE.

Now that I have the separate threads of my story together, I will return to that dark and stormy night, after the burning of the buccaneer schooner, the Curse of the Sea, and the metamorphosis of the supposed Paul Melville into Rafael the Rover.

Without a word the buccaneer captain held out his arms for the irons, and was led away to the gun-deck, where he was securely confined in a small state-room, before the door of which was placed a marine with a musket, while Roy Woodbridge, Luis Ramirez and the crew were taken forward to the fore-castle and ironed.

"Well, Mabel, what do you think of this strange turn in affairs?" Captain Markham asked, slowly pacing the cabin, and addressing his daughter, who, with her face buried in her hands, was seated upon a low ottoman, where she had thrown herself upon coming from on deck.

"I know not what to think, papa," she answered, sadly, without changing her position.

"Well, it is a bad business, I can tell you. I was half inclined to like the buccaneer, from his kindness to you, and his magnificent daring."

"And what will you do with him, papa?" asked Mabel, raising her eyes to her father's face.

"Do with him? Why, what a question! There is but one thing to do with Rafael the Rover."

"And that is—"

"Hang him to the yard-arm. No, stay, I cannot do that, for I have captured him in Spanish waters, so I will have to take him to Havana and deliver him and his men up to the Governor-General."

"And he will be executed then?"

"Yes, in the worst kind of a way."

"What mean you, papa?" asked Mabel, quickly.

"I mean that the Governor-General of Cuba has offered a large price for the body of Rafael the Rover—if dead, so much better for the buccaneer, for, if alive, he is already condemned to be broken on the wheel."

Mabel gave a half-cry of horror, and again buried her head in her hands—to instantly raise it as a vivid blaze of light filled the cabin, followed by a crash as of a thousand guns.

"Is the ship struck and going down?" cried Captain Markham, as he rushed on deck, feeling the vessel sinking beneath his feet.

No, it was simply falling rapidly with the sea, which seemed crouching before a gigantic wave of foam, that, driven by a tornado, was rushing upon them, and not a cable's length away.

"Down all! for your lives hold fast! let her head meet it, helmsman!" yelled Captain Markham, through his silver speaking-trumpet, and as the words left his lips the gale was upon them.

There was the loud bursting of sails, the cracking and crashing of yards, the snapping of ropes, roar of waters, howling of winds, shrieking of men, and the wall of foam passed over the devoted ship, burying her down deep beneath it, and bearing on its bosom a dozen unfortunates who were torn from their hold upon the rigging and bulwarks.

For a moment none believed that the ship would rise, and Mabel, and her negro maid, in the cabin, thought that the ship was going down, down, down to the bottom of the sea, for torrents of water poured into the cabin through the half-open companionway.

But by a mighty effort the noble craft shook off the tons of water that engulfed her, and once more was on the top of the waves, though this first fearful stroke of the storm had left ruin and death behind.

Bruised though he was by being hurled against the companionway, where he caught and clung with giant strength, Captain Markham at once issued his orders, and at his voice the obedient crew sprang to work, and stood at their posts, ready to risk everything to save the vessel, which had been swept around by the gale and was driving before it, almost unmanageable, yet bravely battling the wild waters.

"In God's name, Captain Markham, where are we driving?"

It was Lieutenant Redmond that spoke, and he held his mouth close to his commander's ear.

"God only knows, Redmond. I have lost all bearings and know not north from south. When the tornado struck us, we were in the vicinity of the buccaneer isle."

"Yes, sir, and may now be driving upon it."

"It may be—the waves have put out the binnacle light, and my compass is useless now; besides, I don't think the storm has yet got all her pipes in her teeth," said Captain Markham, and then, as the storm seemed increasing in violence, he shouted:

"Redmond, the ship can't stand this—we must lay to."

"Ay, ay, sir—if we can!"

"We must, Redmond. Set what sail will stand and we will bring her round."

The lieutenant went forward, as quickly as he could, and gave the necessary orders, and the ship, feeling the pressure of her canvas, threatened to run under; but the men were ready at the halyards of the sails set, and four at the wheel awaiting the order to go about.

Springing upon the starboard main rigging, Captain Markham yelled through the trumpet:

"Hard—a-lee!"

The bows swept round with fearful leaps; but not all the way, as the rude waves knocked her back again.

Then again and again was the attempt made, and each time with no better success, until the men began to despair, and a flash of lightning flaming over the sea a hundred voices shrieked forth:

"Land ho!"

It was useless to ask where; all had seen it; they were driving upon the buccaneer isle, and the vessel seemed unmanageable!

"Captain Markham, we are doomed," said Lieutenant Redmond, hoarsely.

"I fear it—I believe it," was the quick reply.

"Rafael the Rover can save you!"

"Good God! Mabel, you here on deck?"

"Yes. You say you are doomed; I say the buccaneer can save you," shouted the maiden above the storm.

"By Heaven! He shall have the chance. Redmond, bring Rafael the Rover to the wheel!"

"And if he saves you he shall go free!"

"No, Mabel—I cannot—"

"Would you be such a coward, father? He shall go free—promise me!"

"Yes!"

"Enough; here he comes," and the maiden shrunk back out of sight, while Captain Markham cried:

"Buccaneer, the sloop is driving to destruction upon your accursed island, which is dead ahead and not more than a league away; can you save her? Remember, your own life is in jeopardy."

"My life is in worse danger if I save her; but I will do all that I can. You should have sent for me sooner," said Rafael, in his deep, calm tones.

"I had forgotten you; it was Mabel that remembered you; but do your duty."

The Rover cast a quick glance over the vessel, and then out upon the dark waters.

Just then a flash of lightning lit up the sea, and loud rung his voice:

"Ready all! Hard a lee!"

Whether it was because the men, having confidence in him, did their duty better, and that springing himself to the wheel he brought it more quickly and harder around than had been done before, we cannot tell; but certain it is the Sea Hawk's bows rushed round with fearful rapidity, hung in the balance, as it were, for an instant, and then the vessel lay to, yet still plunging fearfully.

"We are drifting fast; let go the right bower!" commanded the buccaneer, and the anchor fell into the waves, the cable ran out like lightning, and with a terrific shock the vessel was checked as though it had run upon a rock, and with a suddenness that nearly tumbled the masts upon the deck.

"She drags her anchor!" was passed forward from the windlass.

"Clear away the other anchor!" shouted Rafael, and with another mighty plunge the second anchor went into the sea, checking, with another shock, yet not near as severe, the rapidly-drifting Sea Hawk.

Suddenly, with a tremendous report, followed quickly by a second, as the ends of the iron cables struck the hollow deck, the portion inboards flying back, the two anchors parted, and the vessel swung round and was again like a chip in a mad maelstrom.

"Captain Markham, I must have my own crew on deck—and quick, if you would save your vessel!"

It was no time to hesitate. The order was quickly given and the pirates poured upon deck, Luis Ramirez and Roy Woodbridge at their head.

"Buccaneers to your posts! Ramirez, take the lead and find out where we are! Woodbridge, take the right of the wheel! Stand ready all!" and the deep voice rung out loud and clear and a yell from his crew answered him. They saw life before them now, while a few moments before, in irons, below decks, and with strangers at the wheel, they felt that death was certain.

Springing into the starboard main-rigging, Rafael awaited a cry from Ramirez.

It soon came in ringing tones:

"Twenty fathoms!"

"Good! throw again!"

"Twenty fathoms!"

"Better! throw again!"

"Twenty fathoms!"

"Again!"

"Twenty fathoms!"

A yell burst from the buccaneer crew—they evidently knew their bearings, and Rafael ordered Ramirez to throw once more and then, if the same depth was found, to also take his stand at the wheel.

Again the Spaniard threw the lead, and again it was the same result, and he sprang nimbly to the wheel, to the post of Roy Woodbridge, while Rafael called out:

"Captain Markham, let my two officers alone have the wheel; they can manage it."

"Light ho!"

As quick as the words left the lips of the buccaneer look-out forward, Rafael saw it, and cried, in startling tones:

"Hard! hard down! for your lives!"

The order was promptly obeyed, but too late, for before them a dark object appeared upon the water, and a score of voices cried:

"A wreck! a wreck!"

At the same time a voice was heard:

"Ship ahoy! don't run me down!"

But too late! The light from the stern-ports of the dismantled vessel had been seen too late; there was a crash—a shock, shrieks, and staggering under the blow, the Sea Hawk passed on with the same leaping speed, crouching one moment under a wave, and plunging through another.

"The bowsprit is carried away!" came the cry from forward.

"Rig a spar to serve in its place! lively, too, for your lives, men!" sternly ordered the buccaneer, and ere the crew of the Sea Hawk believed it possible to do half the work, the nimble buccaneers passed the word aft:

"All ready, sir!"

"Bend on the jib!" and in spite of being half-drowned by the waves in which the bows were buried, the order was quickly obeyed, and the sloop-of-war was once more under as much control as was possible in the mad waters and scudding before a gale so fearful.

"Captain Markham, let your men load and fire three guns in quick succession," suddenly ordered Rafael, after peering for some time into the darkness ahead.

The order was promptly obeyed, and the guns flashed forth their pleading cries, and yet Rafael peered forth into the darkness ahead.

"Fire again!"

But as he spoke a bright flame burst up dead ahead, and from what appeared the skies, and again broke forth the cry of the buccaneer crew.

As the glare fell upon the deck, Rafael beheld the form of Mabel Markham crouching down

under the shelter of the bulwarks and stern-gun—she had been braving that fearful storm with the brave men who were so nobly fighting to save the vessel.

"See! Mad Maud is our friend! The danger is over, Miss Markham," and Rafael pointed to the light on the cliff, before which, looking like a fire-fiend in mid-air, stood the mad-woman, apparently enjoying the wild scene before her, and reveling in the shrieks of the crew of the unfortunate vessel that the Sea Hawk had cut down and sent to the bottom.

"We are heading directly into the channel, Captain Markham. In ten minutes the Sea Hawk will be at rest in the basin," said Rafael, calmly, as the cliffs towered above the decks.

"Is there then no longer danger?" asked Mabel.

"To you and the vessel, Miss Markham, no! to me and my men, yes!" and Rafael took his place at the wheel with his two officers, and still directed the heading of the noble vessel, which, but for him, would have gone down with all on board.

CHAPTER XXIX. BROKEN FAITH.

THE course upon which the Sea Hawk was sailing, or rather leaping and staggering, was different from that she had held upon the two former entrances into the island harbor, and fortunately it required but slight deviation from a given point, so that she dashed into the rocky gateway without having to go about, which would have been hazardous in the extreme in the wild waters and under the fearful pressure of the wind.

As the basin opened before them a dark form suddenly deserted the wheel and rushing to the ship's side sprang out into the black waters beneath.

"Man overboard!" cried a voice, in thrilling tones, and several seamen sprang promptly to lower away a boat; but the voice of Captain Markham arrested them.

"Let him go—he is a buccaneer."

"Which one, papa?" cried Mabel, endeavoring to pierce the darkness and see who it was that had left the wheel.

"It is one of my lieutenants, Miss Markham—his name is Luis Ramirez," returned the deep voice of Rafael, and then turning to the American commander, he continued:

"Captain Markham, you had better have another anchor rigged, if you have one—the sloop will rest here safely, though I never before saw it so rough in the basin."

"There is an anchor all ready, sir; when shall it be dropped?" said Captain Markham.

"We have about lost headway—let go the anchor now, sir."

Midshipman Ramsey went forward with the order, and the sloop-of-war was at rest in the island harbor once more.

"Captain Markham," and Rafael turned from the wheel—"I report myself and crew as again your prisoners, sir."

Walter Markham seemed troubled. He essayed to speak, yet uttered no word, and Rafael continued:

"For myself, sir, I ask nothing; but for this officer, Mr. Woodbridge, and my crew, I ask your mercy."

"Father, why do you not speak out? Why do you not say frankly that you hold no men as prisoners who have saved your life, your vessel, and the lives of your daughter, officers and crew?" and there was indignation in the tones of Mabel.

"Mabel, my daughter, I cannot. I will recommend them to mercy—more I cannot do," almost groaned Captain Markham.

"And Rafael the Rover—he will go free; I have your promise to that—"

"Mabel, do not meddle in what does not concern you. He is still a prisoner."

"For shame, father! after he has saved our lives."

"He was acting for himself, too—"

"No, no; I verily believe that Captain Rafael and his whole crew would have let the ship go down, had they expected such a return for their courage. Oh, father! you surely cannot do this deed?"

Captain Markham evidently felt his position most keenly, and wishing to avoid so much publicity, he said, sternly:

"Mr. Redmond, see that this buccaneer lieutenant and his crew are securely confined once more. Captain Rafael, come with me into the cabin, please."

The buccaneers had gathered aft, deeply interested listeners, and at the words of the American commander they looked toward their chief meaningly; one word from him, and few as was their number, unarmed as they were, they would have then and there made one bold stroke for liberty.

But Rafael the Rover gave not that word; on the contrary, he motioned the men back, and followed Captain Markham into the cabin.

"Be seated, sir. What, Mabel, you here?" and Captain Markham seemed annoyed at the presence of his daughter.

"Yes, sir. I suggested that the ship should be put under the command of the buccaneer."

when American naval officers no longer seemed competent, and I received the promise of Captain Markham that Rafael the Rover should be set free if he saved the vessel, so I think I have a right to be here."

It is impossible to describe the tone and manner of Mabel as she thus addressed her father, while she threw herself carelessly upon a divan, a look of defiance upon her beautiful face.

As for Rafael, he gazed upon her with a look of admiration he could not conceal, while he said promptly, for he saw that her words had cut her father deeply:

"I know, Captain Markham, that my lawless career has incurred the highest penalty that the law of nations can inflict upon me, and I am ready to meet my doom, terrible as it will be—for I would choose death at the yard-arm rather than that which I am destined to suffer—"

"I do not understand you, sir; you are not yet sentenced—"

"Pardon me, yet it is your intention to take me to Havana?"

"Yes, sir."

"There I am already condemned to death upon the wheel—to be broken daily upon the wheel until I die; but for myself, sir, I ask little—for my crew I ask everything at your hands."

"They are alike guilty with yourself."

"Upon the plea of having been caught in bad company, I admit it, sir; but I am the leader; I owned the schooner, and I raised the red anchor flag upon its black field; I am Rafael the Rover, the commander of the late schooner, *Curse of the Sea*, and I am the guilty one—they were but my servants, and I ask mercy for them," and Rafael spoke most earnestly.

"And why for them, sir?"

"Because they have this night saved your vessel and your lives."

"And their own lives, too, sir."

"Captain Markham, my men and myself were in irons below your decks; we knew well the fury of the storm, for we are much in these waters, and we knew the dangerous locality you were in, yet no word came from us for release, sir; we preferred to go down with the ship, and die in irons, rather than be hung at the yard-arm, or taken to Havana and garoted. You sent for us, and we saved you and your vessel, and if we saved ourselves, it was to meet a worse death than going to the bottom in a storm. Having saved you, having done their duty nobly, I beg that you release them; your Government will sanction it under the circumstances, and if you do not care for them among your crew, you can let them go, and each man will pledge himself to give up the life of a free-rover. A few may break their oath, but most of them will keep it. I plead for my men, sir, and not myself."

"And have you nothing to ask for yourself?"

"Yes, sir, I have."

"You would have me spare your life, I suppose?"

"No, sir, I do not ask it; but I do beg, when you know what fate awaits me in Havana, that you will lead me forth to the quarter-deck at sunrise, detail a squad of marines, and have me shot. That is all I ask for myself."

"And yet I cannot grant it, sir."

"You are the best judge, sir, of your own actions; do as you please with me; but I suppose you will release my men?"

"No, sir, I will not—I cannot. My Government would never uphold me in it; I would be broken of my commission."

"Father," and Mabel confronted him, "you are wealthy; you are getting along in years, and what is a commission to you, compared with having spared the lives of human beings who had saved your life; your vessel and all? For shame, Captain Markham!"

"Mabel, how dare you speak to me thus? Go at once to your state-room, and—Hol on deck there!"

"Ay, ay, sir," and Fred Ramsey appeared in the companionway.

"Have this buccaneer placed in double irons, and led back to his former quarters."

Rafael bowed, while a strange look passed over his face, and he turned to depart, bestowing one glance upon Mabel.

In an instant she sprang forward and seized his hand, while she said earnestly:

"I am not ungrateful, sir. You saved me once from worse than death the night of that fearful mutiny; to-night you have saved my life and the life of my father and friends, and from my inmost soul I thank you."

Then, with a deep sob, she bowed her head, and left the cabin, while her father, his face livid with rage, stood pointing to the companionway.

The next instant Rafael the Rover was led forth in irons.

CHAPTER XXX. A LIFE FOR A LIFE.

When the morning sun shone over the bay, the tide it showed how terrible had been the tornado, for the basin was white with foam driven into it by the sea, which had rushed savagely against the rocky shore. The calm was only a lull, and here and there a stout tree had been hurled from its height into the valley below.

The *Sea Hawk* also looked considerably the worse for her rough handling by the winds and waves, and the seamen were busy at repairs, with the first peep of day.

Unable to sleep, Captain Markham had gone on deck at an early hour, and as the sun rose above the cliff-tops Mabel joined him there, saluting him with a pleasant good-morning, which he returned affectionately, for he had dreaded his meeting with his daughter, after what had passed the night before, and he felt, after his promise to her, she certainly had a right to feel hurt at his broken faith.

Upon this island not a soul was visible, and the crew of the *Sea Hawk* still believed that the stronghold was deserted by all save the old witch, as they still called Mad Maud.

Whether Luis Ramirez, in his bold leap for life, had reached the shore or not they could not tell. If he had, he was doubtless hidden away in some out-of-the-way crevice of the rocks.

Suddenly Mabel gave a cry that directed every eye upon the shore, where, coming down the glen, a slender form was seen.

Nearer and nearer it approached the beach, until it was discovered to be a youth, scarcely seventeen years of age, and dressed in dark pants, low shoes, a blouse, shirt and jacket, while a sailor's hat was placed jauntily upon one side of his head, half-hiding a mass of black curls.

Mabel saw all this distinctly with the aid of her glass, and then she said:

"He is hailing, sir."

Across the waters came in clear, boyish tones:

"Hol the *Sea Hawk*!"

"Ay, ay! What is it?" asked Lieutenant Redmond.

"I would come aboard. Send a boat for me, please."

"Send my gig after him; but who can he be?" queried Captain Markham, with interest.

The gig, with four oarsmen and a coxswain was lowered and rowed rapidly ashore, and soon returned with the youth, whose face was almost womanly in its beauty.

"I would see Captain Markham, sir," he said to Fred Ramsey, who met him at the gangway.

"I will lead you to him. Captain Markham, this gentleman would see you."

"Well, young man, how can I serve you?" asked Captain Markham, gazing with admiration upon the handsome face and slender, graceful form before him.

"You can serve me greatly, sir, and in doing so serve others. You have Rafael the Rover and his crew prisoners on board your vessel?"

"How know you that?"

"It matters not; they are your prisoners."

"They are. What of it?"

"A great deal, sir. You will take them to Havana to die?"

"Yes."

"That must not be, sir; you must release them."

"Great God! who are you, sir, that dares come on board my vessel and tell me what I shall do?" cried the captain, in a rage.

"I am one, sir, who will enforce my demands," firmly said the youth.

"Enforce! You, a mere boy, come aboard an American man-of-war and talk of enforcing commands. Put this youth in irons, Ramsey."

"No, I came here, sir, under a flag of truce," and the youth held up a white handkerchief he held, tied upon a cane, and then he added, sneeringly:

"Savages even respect a white flag and its bearer."

Captain Markham's face colored, and to hide his confusion, he asked:

"Who are you, and from whom do you come?"

"I am one of the buccaneer band. I come from those who have the power to make you treat with them."

"Is not this island deserted?"

"You have already seen a woman upon the island, and now you see me. How can it be deserted?"

"I mean, have the buccaneers left it, or if leaving it, have they returned?"

"Captain Markham, if you do not grant my request you will find that question answered. Will you release Rafael and his men?"

"I will not."

"This is your decision, sir?"

"It is."

"Think, sir, you may have cause to rue it when too late."

"My mind is made up. They shall die."

"You will not be able to go out of the basin, sir, without the aid of a most experienced pilot."

"I will force one of the buccaneers, under penalty of death, to pilot me."

"If he is to die by the garote, or gallows, he will not fear death."

"Then I shall give him his life and gold, to do it."

The youth's face paled. He feared that some one of the buccaneers would gladly accept such terms to save himself, and he remained silent, and Captain Markham said, grimly:

"I hold the winning hand, my fine fellow."

"Not yet, sir; do you see those cliffs?" and the youth pointed to the overhanging rocky walls of the channel.

"Yes; what of them?"

"Did you search them when you were here before?"

"No, there was no means of reaching them."

"You are mistaken, sir. Upon the right cliff the pilot beacon that guided you last night was lighted."

"You are right. Well, what of that?"

"Upon both of those cliffs are mounted heavy guns."

"Impossible! boy, you cannot frighten by threats."

"I tell you the truth, sir—there is a strong armament up there, and brave men to man the guns."

"Nonsense."

"Captain Markham, I will prove my words; lend me your trumpet."

The boy took the speaking-trumpet and hailed:

"Hol the cliff!"

"Ay, ay—on board the *Sea Hawk*!" came back from the top of the cliff.

"Send a broadside against yonder wooded hill!" again shouted the boy.

Instantly there flashed forth from the summits of

both of the cliffs a dozen bursts of red flame, and a dozen roars commingled, while as many iron messengers sped howling above the topmasts of the *Sea Hawk*, and went crashing into the timber upon the hillside.

Every face on that deck then paled. No, there were two that flushed—the youth's with pride, at proving his power, Mabel's with hope that Rafael would yet go free.

"Boy, you have spoken the truth; but those guns are for vessels coming into the basin."

"You are mistaken, sir. They command the *Sea Hawk* where she now is, and can send a plunging fire upon her as she runs out of the channel and keep her in range for half a league. Will you release Rafael and his men now?"

"I will not; I will run the gantlet going out, and string up to the yard-arm a dozen of your vile crew to prove I am in earnest."

But the youth was not daunted by the savage threat, for he quickly replied:

"Captain Markham, you lost a favorite lieutenant some time since?"

"Do you refer to Bancroft Edmunds?" asked the officer, eagerly.

"I do, sir."

"Know you aught of him?"

"Yes."

"Is he alive?"

"He is."

"Where?"

"On the island, and in the power of the buccaneers."

"Good God! can this be true?"

"It is so true, sir, that if harm befalls Captain Rafael, the life of Bancroft Edmunds shall at once be the forfeit."

Captain Markham dropped his head. The youth again held the advantage.

"Would you do this crime?" he suddenly asked.

"Ay, would I! If Rafael the Rover dies, Lieutenant Edmunds's death shall follow in the same manner! I swear it, Captain Markham."

"The one is an outlaw—a cruel corsair—the other an honored officer of the navy of the United States—"

"They both are men; life is as dear to one as to the other. Will you exchange prisoners, Captain Markham? for I now hold the winning hand!"

"No, sir; that is, I will take my men and rescue poor Edmunds—"

"Then I will give the signal to have the *Sea Hawk* sunk where she lies! Will you exchange prisoners, I again ask, sir?"

"I will not, sir."

"Then it shall be a life for a life."

Captain Markham was silent; he felt that he was in a trap, and he knew not what to say.

A seaman approached at this moment and said:

"The Rover asks to see you, sir—"

"Bring him here," and then turning to Lieutenant Redmond he said, in a low tone:

"We are in a scrape, Redmond."

"Yes, sir; but the buccaneer should not escape."

"But poor Edmunds?"

"Even if he dies, sir, the Rover should not escape."

Lieutenant Redmond is anxious for promotion at any cost; he would step into Lieutenant Edmunds's shoes."

It was Mabel who spoke, in cold, sneering tones, and her words cut deep, for Ross Redmond had made up his mind to try and win the maiden for himself.

The youth heard the remarks, and a smile on his lips proved that he appreciated the situation.

At this moment two marines approached, Rafael the Rover, heavily ironed, walking proudly between them.

"Captain Markham, through the open hatchway I heard all that has passed, and I came up to see if I could not arrange a compromise," and Rafael glanced fixedly at the youth, a strange light in his eyes.

The youth met the look, blushed like a young girl, and bent down his gaze.

"What terms would you wish to make as a compromise, Sir Buccaneer?" haughtily said Captain Markham.

"Your vessel is in danger, sir. My island guns, as this—this youth has said, command you, and there is force enough on shore, I tell you frankly, to defeat any landing you might attempt to make, while you could not run out of here without a most experienced pilot."

"I will offer his life and gold to any man who will be my pilot."

"No man will accept the terms, sir."

"What! do you mean to say that your buccaneer crew have such a high sense of honor that they will not accept the terms I offer?"

"It is just what I said, sir. They are below; call them up and try them," indifferently said Rafael.

"By Heaven! I'll do it! Mr. Redmond, have those sea-cuthroats brought on deck," angrily ordered Captain Markham, while Rafael the Rover calmly glanced shoreward, an unfathomable look in his dark, sad eyes.

CHAPTER XXXI. THE ENVOY.

WHEN Luis Ramirez sprang into the sea, he took the desperate chances between life and death—and he won life.

When the waves engulfed him, he felt himself drawn under by the hull of the *Sea Hawk*; but a strong swimmer, he managed to gain the surface and boldly struck out for the shore, which he reached in safety, though greatly fatigued.

Yet without rest he hurried on to the hills, and by the same route taken by Rafael on his visit to the cavern, he reached the rocky chamber, glided through it morosely, cursing back those who crowded around him, and stood before the old chief.

"Well, Ramirez, from whence come you?" asked the chief, eagerly.

"From the sea."

"And the schooner—"

"Is at the bottom!"

"Maledictions! did they sink her?"

"No; the lightning struck her—set her on fire, and we took to our boats—"

"And the men are with you?"

"No, I am alone. We went on board the *Sea Hawk* to keep from drowning."

"Curses and furies! and why is it you are here?"

"My story is soon told: the tornado swept over us—the Sea Hawk I mean; we were driving directly on the island, and we were released to save the vessel."

"Why, where was my son, man?"

"He was on board, too; he directed, of course; none other could have brought the vessel in in such a blow and wild sea."

"Released, you say; why, was he discovered?"

"Yes; some of the crew betrayed him as soon as they came on board, and he was ironed as the rest of us."

"Oh, curses! curses! He will die."

"Yes, he will be taken to Havana," coolly said the Spaniard.

"And you—how did you escape, senior Spaniard?"

"I stood at the wheel with Captain Rafael and Woodbridge, and not wishing to take the chances of being pardoned for our services, I sprang overboard into the sea, as soon as we were in the basin, and swam ashore."

"You were right—why did not Rafael and the others follow your brave example?"

"Captain Rafael is too honorable to be a pirate. He preferred to wait and trust in being pardoned, I suppose," sneered Ramirez.

"That will never be; he will be hung—nay, he will be broken on the wheel, for I have been condemned to that fate—I and my officers, while the men will be *quited*; but this must not be. You say the vessel is now in the basin?" and the old chief sprang to his feet with nervous energy.

"She is; and by this time Rafael and his crew are again in irons."

"He shall not die—never! Salvador, go to the further cliff, with a crew of a dozen men, to man the guns there. Ramirez, you take as many men with you to the nearer cliff, and see that the guns are ready for immediate action. I will retain the remainder of my band to attack landing-parties, and I'll yet bring Walter Markham to terms. His vessel may sail, but he must remain behind! Though hiding in holes, the Island Buccaneers are not dead yet," and the old chief spoke with a resolution that proved he intended carrying the war to the enemy's very deck.

"Senior chief, can I speak to you?"

"Well, Nellie, what have you to say? If not connected with our present trouble, put it off," said the old man, as the maiden stood before him.

"I would ask, senior chief, to be allowed to go on board the Sea Hawk, and—"

"Give him another hold upon us? Oh, no, girl!"

"I mean to go under a flag of truce, senior. I think I can make a proposal to him that will gain the release of Captain Rafael and his men."

"The girl is mad, like her mother," said the chief.

"No, senior; I am not mad, and I can prove it. I have the means of bringing Captain Markham to terms you cannot suspect."

"Name it!"

"I cannot, sir; but I ask you to trust me in this matter. To negotiate you will have to send some one on board, so let it be me."

"You are but a girl."

"And yet a girl has had great power, senior, in some cases; but I will not go as a woman; I will go in man's attire. Please let me be your envoy."

"Well, get yourself ready, and when the morning comes, I will talk more with you about it, for you seem strangely earnest in your request."

"I am, senior, and I do believe good will come of it; but I dare not now tell you what power I hold to aid in the release of Captain Rafael and his men."

"Well, you shall go. Now I must arrange my plans. Salvador, have every able-bodied man assemble in the large cavern," and the chief buckled on his belt of arms, and placed upon his head his boarding-cap, the same which he had worn in many a desperate struggle upon a blood-stained deck.

In half an hour the buccaneers were all assembled, three score and ten; in the large cavern, and in a few words the chief made known to them all that had happened, and the perilous position of Captain Rafael and his men, in irons on the Sea Hawk.

Then he continued:

"Men, that vessel must not sail with our comrades on board; we must bring them to terms, for our companions have saved the ship and her crew."

"Salvador, select your men and go to your post. Ramirez, you do likewise, and I will head the remainder of my band—hold! we must first agree upon signals; but who have we here?"

All started as a stranger entered their presence, and every hand sought a weapon, for they believed that they had been betrayed—that their foes were upon them.

"Hold! it is I, Pretty Nellie," cried the stranger, and the old chief exclaimed:

"By Heaven! girl, you are so changed your mad mother would not know you. Why, you are a perfect-looking boy, and will make a splendid envoy."

The maiden bowed. The signals for action were arranged, and the maiden still refusing to tell the secret power she held over Captain Markham, set out for the shore, where she was to remain concealed from those on the Sea Hawk, until she beheld her comrades in position.

An hour thus passed; daylight came, and the sun arose; then the girl, who reserved the signal to go on board, and she boldly walked down to the beach and landed the Sea Hawk.

The reader will now see that the fearless young envoy, who confronted Captain Markham upon his own deck, was none other than Pretty Nellie, the Queen of the Isle, as she was called by the buccaneers.

CHAPTER XXXII. THE COMPROMISE.

TEN minutes after the order of Captain Markham the buccaneers were ranged on deck, Roy Woodbridge taking his place near Rafael.

In their faces shone a ray of hope, for they believed after all they had done for the sloop that they might be pardoned.

"Outlaws," began Captain Markham, "your chief has led me into a trap here; his guns command the sloop with plunging shots, and he has a force on shore, and one of my officers in the power of those on the island, so you see he holds a strong advantage, though himself a prisoner."

"Now his crimes, and yours, have made you outlaws on sea and land, and you should not expect mercy; but I am willing to give not only his liberty,

but one thousand dollars in gold to the buccaneer who will pilot me out of this basin, for I will put to sea, in spite of the guns on the cliff. Now who is the man that will accept his life on such terms?"

The men looked at each other, and none spoke for some minutes; then one asked:

"Do these terms include Captain Rafael and Lieutenant Woodbridge?"

"Your lieutenant can accept the terms, yes—but your chief, no."

Roy Woodbridge smiled a strange smile that those who did not know him could understand.

"Well, speak out, my man—you who will take his life and the gold, for running us out to sea."

Yet no answer came, and Captain Markham, his brow darkening, continued:

"There were several of you last night, who told me that this was Rafael, when I believed him to be an American officer—let one of those men speak out."

Still no answer, and the enraged captain cried:

"Are you such fools that you throw away your lives? What man accepts my terms? You, sir, I make the offer to you," and he turned toward Roy Woodbridge, whose face was filled with hot blood as he quickly retorted:

"And if you were not a villain at heart, sir, you would not thus suspect that I could be so base."

"This to me, sir? You shall rue it."

Roy Woodbridge again smiled, while Rafael spoke up at once:

"You may save yourself further entreaty, Captain Markham, for while I admit that those men who betrayed me—and I know them—might have accepted your liberal offer, I may as well tell you that they could not, if they would. Lieutenant Woodbridge, there, besides myself and Luis Ramirez, who is on the island, alone know this channel—if I except, perhaps, two others. A calm day, with your boats ahead, all these men could not pilot the Sea Hawk to sea without knocking her bottom out of her."

"Then I shall take the chances and stand to sea with you and your crew on my deck, to prevent the fire from the cliffs."

"That will not prevent, sir, and both my men and myself are accustomed to iron storms," coolly returned Rafael.

"Sir chief, I will yet humble you; I will yet win," retorted Captain Markham, his face red with anger.

"Captain Markham, I will offer you a compromise," and the deep voice of the chief arrested the attention of the furious officer.

"I will not compromise, sir."

"Hear me, sir, for if I am in irons, and under sentence of death, you, your daughter and crew are in equal danger. I offer you a compromise."

"Name it, buccaneer."

"It is that you release this officer and crew—"

"Never, sir, never!"

"Hear me, sir, and then do as you please."

"I am listening."

"Well, sir, I repeat, if you will release Lieutenant Woodbridge and my men, who have rendered you good service in the past night, I will pilot you to sea."

"You!" exclaimed Captain Markham, in the veriest astonishment, while a murmur ran around the deck—a murmur of surprise and admiration.

"I repeat, sir, release those that I request, and I will pilot you safely to sea."

"Yes, get your vile crew on shore and then have your guns turned upon me, in the hope that you will be killed instead of being broken upon the wheel to which you are condemned."

"You mistake, sir; the vessel shall not be fired upon."

"And then?"

"You can carry me to Havana to meet my doom."

Even Captain Markham was struck with admiration at this noble self-sacrifice; but, anxious to gain all that he could, he asked:

"And Lieutenant Edmunds—will he be restored to the ship ere she sails?"

Rafael turned toward the supposed youth, who promptly replied:

"No."

"You will not give him up, then?"

"I will not, except for Captain Rafael. After the Sea Hawk is at sea, send Captain Rafael half-way ashore in a boat. I will come out and meet you with Lieutenant Edmunds; the exchange can be made then, and you can go to Havana and be honored for having sunk the famous Curse of the Sea—with the aid of the lightning."

"Do you insult me, boy?"

"Ah, no, sir. You are in a bad box, and I was just showing you the best way to extricate yourself. If you have captured Rafael the Rover and his men, things are about equal, for we hold your lieutenant and command your ship with our guns, while you cannot get to sea unless we let you go."

Captain Markham felt that the young envoy spoke the truth, and he said, turning to Rafael:

"Deliver up my lieutenant, now in your hands, and I will accede to your terms—that is, give up your officer and men, and carry you to Havana."

"So be it, sir; let the men go ashore."

"No!"

It was the disguised Nellie who spoke, and all turned upon her.

"Well, what have you to say?" asked Captain Markham.

"I have this to say, that I will not give up Lieutenant Edmunds, except in exchange for Captain Rafael."

"But your chief says he will deliver up my officer."

"He may do as he pleases with himself and his men; but I hold Lieutenant Edmunds prisoner, and I refuse to give him up, except upon the terms stated. Nay, more: if harm befalls Captain Rafael he assured Edmunds shall die."

There was that in the handsome face and manner of the speaker that told Captain Markham argument was useless; he must yield, and sail with Rafael, and feel satisfaction in the thought that he held the chief, and had himself seen the fleet schooner, *Curse of the Sea*, blown into a thousand atoms; hence he said:

"Well, I accept the offer of your chief. Mr. Redmond, send this officer and his men on shore in the cutters; but first, Sir Buccaneer, you pledge me your word that I will not be fired upon!"

"I do, sir—let me have a word with this youth."

"In my presence only, sir."

"Then I have nothing to say," firmly averred Rafael.

"Will you speak before me, Captain Rafael?"

It was Mabel Markham that spoke, and Rafael answered at once:

"Yes, lady, if your father consents."

"Papa, I will act in your place in this unpleasant duty of listener—can I?"

"Yes; I certainly can trust you. You are at liberty to speak to the youth, buccaneer."

Rafael bowed, and painfully made his way a few steps distant, the irons on his ankles and wrists clanking ominously, and the supposed youth following close behind, while Mabel Markham took her stand near.

"Nellie, I have penetrated your disguise, and from my heart I thank you for the fearless effort you have made to save me; but it is useless: I must perish, unless some unforeseen chance of escape occur, and I have not given up hope, tell my father."

"And tell him, Nellie, that he must let the vessel go to sea without a single shot being fired at it—tell him I have pledged my word that it shall be so, and to leave all with me—do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

"And, Nellie, I wish you to release Bancroft Edmunds. I ask it as a dying man would ask it—will you?"

"Do you mean for him to come on here now?"

"Yes, if you will."

"I will not."

"Then, at another time let him go free unharmed. He is a noble fellow, and was but doing his duty. How he was taken I know not—"

"I took him, and none but myself know where he is concealed; in fact, none know that he is on the island."

"Then let him go at some time; aid him to make his escape, for he has many to love him. Will you, Nellie?"

"He shall go free; but how will you be revenged should you die?"

"Do not think of me. If I die, I need no one to avenge me. I am an outlaw, and I must not expect mercy."

"Rafael, you are a brave, noble man, and I would give my life to save you," broke from the maiden, while tears filled her eyes.

"Maiden—for such I now know you to be—Rafael the Rover is condemned, and a prisoner, but he is not yet dead; he has friends on this vessel; have hope."

Both turned quickly toward Mabel, for she it was that had spoken; but, with no trace upon her beautiful face of having given a word of hope, she stood, as though awaiting the conclusion of the conversation between the two.

"The Virgin bless you, lady! I now have hope. Captain Rafael, is there more that you would say?"

"Nothing; only don't forget poor Edmunds, and do not let the Sea Hawk be fired upon. My pledged word shall not be forfeited."

"It shall not be. Farewell, senior captain," and Nellie grasped the manacled hands in both her own, and wheeled quickly away.

"Captain Markham, if you will knock these irons from my wrists, sir, I will take the wheel," and Rafael turned calmly toward the commander, who stepped up to his daughter and asked:

"What said they, Mabel?"

"Nothing treasonable, sir. He urged that his orders, not to fire on the vessel, should be carried out, and begged the release of Bancroft Edmunds."

"The fellow has then really some good in him," turning to his lieutenant, he said:

"Mr. Redmond, let these fellows go ashore. Another time, under better auspices, we will take them and string them up to the yard-arm."

The cutter was piped alongside, and the men ordered to get into it, but Roy Woodbridge stepped to the side of his chief, and said in a low, quick tone:

"Rafael, this is noble of you, and just what I expected of you; but, have hope; the old lugger lies in the south cove, and I will follow you to Havana, and have a brave crew at my back. Farewell, and have hope. I'll rescue you or die!"

The two men grasped hands, and as the lieutenant went over the side the crew came along, and, excepting the few who had, with Luis Ramirez, betrayed their chief, grasped his hand in farewell, and thanked him for their lives.

As the last man went over the side into the cutter, Nellie passed close to where Mabel stood, and said in tones that came from her heart:

"Lady, don't let him die!"

Mabel Markham made no reply; her heart and brain were on fire with conflicting emotions, and she dare not trust herself to speak.

Lightly Nellie ran down into the waiting boat, the order to cast off was given, and as the crew pulled shoreward, the anchor was hauled a trip, the sails were unfurled, and when the cutter, after landing its cargo on the beach, returned, the Sea Hawk was headed seaward and moving through the water.

"Where is the buccaneer?" suddenly cried Captain Markham, as he turned and did not see the chief where he had left him.

"I am here, sir; I asked Mr. Ramsey to get me the cap and shirt of one of my men, that I might not be recognized, and be believed to be in yonder party, until too late to do the ship any harm when found out that I am on board, should my order not to fire not be obeyed."

"Hang the fellow! he has the honor of a nobleman," muttered Captain Markham, and he took his stand by the wheel, upon which the hands of Rafael already rested, guiding the vessel's course in her seaward flight.

As the Sea Hawk gained a good offing, having swiftly sped through the dangerous channel, a commotion was visible upon the cliffs, and immediately after a puff of smoke, a deep boom and an iron shot came almost together.

"They have found I was not one of my officers or crew at the wheel, and are opening fire; but we are safe, sir," said Rafael, as the fire from the cliffs was poured hot and fast after the flying vessel, now almost out of range.

"Yes; their fire is useless; we are now out of danger, I suppose."

"Yes, Captain Markham."

"Very well. Mr. Redmond, put this buccaneer

again in double irons, and, sir, lay your course for Havana."

"Ay, ay, sir," and upon the face of Ross Redmond there was a look of evident satisfaction, for he had never liked Rafael, even in his character of Paul Melville; he had feared him as a dangerous rival for the hand of Mabel Markham.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE DEATH-LEAP.

WHEN the party of buccaneers landed upon the beach, both Roy Woodbridge and Pretty Nellie were anxious that the command of Captain Rafael should be carried out, regarding the not firing upon the Sea Hawk, and they did not hasten to the old chief, fearing that he would be so enraged at the turn affairs had taken, and expecting his son would be killed, he would immediately open fire upon the flying vessel, not only with the hope of sinking the sloop, but also of killing the young buccaneer.

As they hesitated some time upon the beach, the old chief ran down to them, just as the Sea Hawk glided from sight between the rocky walls of the channel.

"Well, where is Captain Rafael?" he exclaimed, glancing quickly over the crowd and failing to see him among those in front of him.

"He is on the sloop-of-war, senior chief," returned Roy Woodbridge, calmly.

"Sainted devils! what does he there?" yelled the old man.

"He remained on board of his own will; it was the only way a compromise could be made."

"A compromise! He remained and allowed you all to go free? This is the compromise, is it?"

"It is, chief. Captain Markham refused to allow any of us to go, and offered life and gold to any man who would pilot the vessel out—"

"He might well offer that. No one could accept his terms," sneered the old man.

"I could have done so, senior; but I am no traitor."

"No, Woodbridge, you are a true man; but this frets me; go on."

"Well, senior, Pretty Nellie here did all in her power, and no conclusion being come at, Captain Rafael said he would remain and carry the vessel to sea, if the American captain would release me and the men, and this was finally agreed upon."

"Oh, curses! Do you know that he goes to his death—to the worst death that could be visited upon him?"

"I do, senior, and I sail to-night for Havana, in the lugger, and he is not yet executed."

"You are a brave boy. Go at once and see what can be done; but sent him no message to me?"

"Yes, senior chief," said Nellie; "he bade me say to you that there was hope while there was life, and I know that he has one friend on the vessel—one who will serve him without fear of consequences—"

"Curses on friends on that ship! Ho! the cliff!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" came back in the voice of Salvador.

"Train your guns on that vessel and sink her!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Senior chief, Captain Rafael ordered that the vessel should pass out unmolested; he pledged his word to it," said Roy Woodbridge.

"Captain Rafael does not command here now. I will try and kill him at the wheel, for it is better to die thus than be broken on the wheel when he reaches Havana. Besides, we may wreck the sloop and after all the noble boy may be saved. Ho! the cliff."

"Ay, ay, senior."

"Aim at the stern of the sloop—at the wheel and sink the cursed craft!"

"Ay, ay, chief," and the guns having now been gotten into position on the sea side of the cliff, began to open rapidly, but with no effect, as the Sea Hawk was almost out of range.

"Oh, God! must he die as he is condemned to?"

"Quick, Woodbridge, get the lugger ready for sea, and take with you all the men you need. But hold! are those men with you who betrayed Rafael?" and there was an ominous threatening tone in the voice.

"Yes, senior chief. Here, Maldox, Durango, Lucas, Francisco, and Miguel, step out and face your chief," sternly ordered Roy Woodbridge, a slight exultation in his voice, for he felt that the men should be punished.

"Those are the traitors, are they? Five of them," said the chief, in suppressed tones of passion.

"And Luis Ramirez."

"Curmba! and Luis Ramirez, the Spanish officer?" almost shrieked the chief.

"Ay, senior; he denounced the captain first, and called upon the crew to bear him out; these five sustained him."

"Perdition seize them all! Come, Woodbridge, come with me to the cliffs. Follow, men! And you, five, come to your doom!"

With fury in every feature of his face, the old chief led the way, followed by the party, the five men who had betrayed Rafael marching between two of their loyal comrades.

Circling the basin, they went in among a number of large boulders, and suddenly stopped in front of what seemed a bare wall; but a motion of the chief's hand pulled aside what was only painted canvas, made to resemble the rocky face of the cliff, and a large cavern was revealed, into which they all passed, and by a winding path gradually ascended until they came out on the summit of the cliff, to the right of the channel entrance.

Here they found themselves in a kind of fort, for several guns were mounted there, and were yet warm from firing upon the flying Sea Hawk, while Salvador and his crew stood in silence, gazing upon the approaching party.

Upon the cliff lay an ingenious bridge of ropes and boards, which, by means of raw-hide strips, that stretched across the chasm to the other side, was used as a fort, and distant a dozen fathoms, could be drawn over the abyss and made to span it securely, making a safe, yet dizzy passageway from fortress to fortress—a bridge for the skillful feet and clear head of a sailor, but not for a landsman to attempt, as it looked sheer down two hundred feet upon the sea on one side and the basin on the other.

"But the bridge across Salvador," sturdily said the chief, looking the party at the pass.

A small piece of board, with a slender cord attached, was immediately thrown by a stalwart buccaneer

across to the other cliff, and seized there, the ropes were drawn over and then the frail-looking bridge.

"Now come across here all of you!" commanded the chief.

The crew of the guns in the other fortress at once, in single file, crossed the swaying bridge, and watching them until the last had reached the spot where he stood, the chief called out:

"Where is Luis Ramirez?"

"He went up to the cavern, senior, some time since," answered one of the men.

"When did he go?"

"At the time the cutter left the side of the Sea Hawk, senior."

"Yes, he knew then that his treachery would be found out; but he shall not escape me. Salvador, when these men have met their doom, leave a lookout here, and search the whole island for Luis Ramirez. If he resists capture, shoot him down as you would a dog; but now, put these five men in irons, and then shove a plank out over the cliff, for they shall walk to their death."

A thrill of horror passed through the frames of the doomed men. They felt there was no hope, and they cowered down with abject, piteous fear, pleading for their lives in heart-rending tones; but the stern old chief was inexorable. The plank was rigged—that is, one end was tied to a heavy gun, the other projected out over the frightful leap, and the men ranged in line to walk to their fate.

Unable longer to gaze upon the sickening sight, Pretty Nellie turned away, and fearlessly crossed the bridge to the other cliff. There she paused, and a fascination she could not resist caused her to look back.

The order to march had been given by the old chief, and the first man to die walked boldly out upon the plank. It tipped, and he was launched forth upon his downward flight—no word or cry upon his lips.

Like a shot he went downward, struck the water feet first, and disappeared forever beneath the waves.

The second man, trembling, staggering, groaning, walked the plank, and from his lips, as he felt himself falling, burst a cry that echoed and re-echoed through the island.

Then followed the others, begging, cursing, praying; and the leap of death was over—the stern old chief avenged for the betrayal of his son. No, not fully avenged, for Luis Ramirez yet lived.

Sick at heart and faint, Nellie crossed the cliff, when the last man had gone down to his doom, and upon the other side of the rock hung a rope-ladder, by which she rapidly descended to the ground, upon the opposite shore of the basin; but, apparently well acquainted with the path, she circled around the harbor and soon came to the buccaneer hamlet, and sought her own cabin.

Reappearing in half an hour in her feminine costume, she started off for a walk up the mountain, and soon disappeared in the thick timber that covered the hillsides.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN ENCOUNTER THAT ENDS FATAALLY.

HAD Luis Ramirez been able to foresee the result of his betrayal of his chief, he would certainly not have done so; but, thirsting for revenge upon him, for having taken from him Inez Revilla, he was determined to avenge himself upon Rafael whenever it was in his power.

Therefore, when taken on board the Sea Hawk, and feeling that he was doomed, he at once swore that Rafael should not escape, and denounced him as the Rover.

Had he thought an instant, he might have seen that his chief, acting as an officer on the Sea Hawk, could have perhaps saved the whole crew from death, and permitted them to escape.

But, blinded by passion, he did not think of this, and the result was that Rafael was also placed in irons.

When brought upon deck, to aid in the management of the vessel, Luis Ramirez determined to escape, if the slightest opportunity offered, and watching his chance, he bounded overboard as the Sea Hawk entered the basin, and wended his way at once to the cavern in the hills, little dreaming but that the Sea Hawk would be victorious against the island buccaneers, and intending to betray them to Captain Markham and pilot the sloop to sea, upon condition that he should receive his liberty and a stated sum in gold.

But his plans miscarried, as the reader has seen, and when, to his surprise, he saw the schooner's crew going ashore in the cutter of the Sea Hawk, and knew that his treachery would now be known, he made some excuse to his men upon the cliff, and hastily descending the rope-ladder, ran down to the shore, intending to spring into the water and swim out to the vessel and offer to act as pilot, and aid in the capture of the island buccaneers.

But, when he reached the rocky shore, the Sea Hawk was a cable's length away and just entering the passage between the cliffs.

Cursing his ill fate, he saw that he must act promptly if he wished to save himself, and at a rapid pace he ran toward the hills, avoiding being seen.

Entering the commissary cave, he quickly loaded himself down with provisions and started for the upper hills, to seek the retreat where he had hidden Inez Revilla, and which was known, he believed, but to Salvador and Rafael.

Rafael he knew had remained on board the Sea Hawk, and Salvador he did not fear—as he knew him to be a friend, for once he had saved the life of the guard-house keeper, when, as a sailor on the ship on which Ramirez was a lieutenant, he had been sentenced to be garoted as a deserter. No, Salvador, he felt, would not betray him, and who else could, that was then on the island?

Yes, he would be safe in that retreat, until some night he could steal out, go to the cove where the small boats were hidden away, and thus make his escape from the island.

Notwithstanding his load of provisions, for he had laid in a goodly supply, not forgetting wines, he walked along upon the unfrequented path, and soon came to the vine-clad rock.

Cautiously he glanced around him to see that he was not observed, and then pulling aside the vines placed his bundles within and sprang after them.

Turning he carefully arranged the growth over the opening, and picking up his provisions walked through the tunnel-like cave, a feeling of security upon him.

There stood the cabin in the little opening. The spring bubbled cheerfully up from the rocks; a bird sung sweetly in the branches of a tree, and all seemed to invite to safe repose.

The door stood ajar, and pushing it wide open he entered the cabin.

But a cry of surprise sprung to his lips, and he quickly let his load slide to the floor, and laid his hand upon his pistol.

The sight that had so startled Luis Ramirez was a man, lying at full length upon the cot, idly smoking a cigar and reading a book.

In an instant this man was upon his feet, and displayed a fine form, clad in the uniform of a lieutenant of the United States navy, while his dark face was handsome, resolute and fearless.

Upon the table near him lay a brace of pistols and a sword, upon the hilt of which his hand quickly rested, drawing it from the scabbard.

"Sainted Virgin! but who are you! and what do you here?" cried Luis Ramirez, in a tone of haughty surprise.

"It is a question I might ask you, senior," replied Bancroft Edmunds, coolly, speaking in Spanish, as Ramirez had done.

"I asked you the question, senior, and I demand an answer."

"Demand is a word that should only be used by one who is able to enforce his demand," retorted Bancroft, quickly.

Luis Ramirez half-raised his pistol, and the American as quickly followed his example.

Then the Spaniard lowered his pistol—he felt that he could not afford to have a pistol-shot fired there, even though his aim would be true.

Bancroft Edmunds also lowered his weapon. There was but one man before him, and his appearance indicated that he had accidentally discovered him in the retreat, and for the same prudential reason that governed the Spaniard he cared not to have others brought there by the report of firearms.

"I am able to enforce my demand; the senior wears a sword," said Ramirez.

"If you seek a quarrel you shall have it—and to the death, if you will," replied the young officer, who felt that the only course he had to pursue was to silence his enemy, who he did not doubt was one of the buccaneer officers, brought there to the cabin for some reasons of his own.

"I do seek a quarrel, senior, and it shall be to the bitter end. Come on!" and Luis Ramirez, who prided himself, and with justice, too, upon his magnificent skill with the sword, threw himself upon the defensive.

Though it seemed strange to him that the Spaniard had not fired upon him, and appeared to prefer the interior of the cabin to the open air for the combat, Bancroft did not stop to comment upon these circumstances, but promptly advanced to meet the buccaneer, quietly remarking:

"Your sword has greater length than mine, senior, but I will let that go in your favor."

The coolness of the American, and the indifferent manner in which he gave him odds, put Luis Ramirez more thoroughly upon his guard; his opponent must be a skilled swordsman.

Springing nimbly forward, Ramirez crossed the blade of the American, and by a skillful feint attempted to see what his enemy really was with the weapon.

The result was that the Spaniard was out-generalized in his own game, for the American calmly met the attack, parried the stroke, and cut a deep gash in the shoulder of his foe.

Maddened with rage Ramirez endeavored to reach one of the pistols, which he had taken from his belt and laid on the table; but Bancroft Edmunds, divining his intention, at once pressed him so hard that he drove him back, and placed himself between his enemy and the firearms, at the same time saying:

"We are fighting with swords, senior, not pistols."

As Bancroft spoke a form darkened the cabin-door, and coming in, closed it.

It was Pretty Nellie, her face pale, her eyes ablaze.

But no word did she utter. She had just witnessed one fearful scene; she could certainly look upon a sword encounter without fear.

Bancroft Edmunds bowed to her, with a smile, and still kept pressing his enemy hard.

As for Luis Ramirez he scowled, at sight of the maiden, and turned a shade paler—he feared he was tracked—lost; even if he disarmed or slew his adversary, which was doubtful.

Whether it was the presence of a witness to their combat, or not, it is hard to say, but both men fought with renewed energy, and they grew every moment more determined.

That Bancroft Edmunds was the better swordsman was evident, for several times Pretty Nellie saw him let pass a chance to take the life of his adversary, and she felt that he fought to disarm him, not wishing to slay him before her eyes, and observing that Luis Ramirez was devoting every energy to kill the American, she said earnestly:

"Senior Edmunds, that man would kill you if he could; don't let my presence deter you from defending your life."

The young officer said, quickly:

"I thank you. I regret it; yet it is perhaps my only chance."

As he spoke he struck down the weapon of Luis Ramirez, and drove his own sword through his body.

With a curse breaking from his lips, a mingled cry and groan, Luis Ramirez fell upon the rock flooring of the cabin, a dead man.

"Seniorita, I regret that your eyes should have witnessed such a scene," said Bancroft, coolly wiping his blade and returning it to its scabbard. "But I assure you the quarrel was not of my seeking. He found me here, and I felt that my life depended upon his not giving the alarm."

"He would not have done so, senior; he was a friend of mine, and as to me seeing the fatal encounter, my eyes had but a short while before witnessed a far more terrible scene; but let me tell you all that has passed; the Sea Hawk has been again in the basin."

"Been! then that implies that she is gone!" said the lieutenant, with a shade of disappointment.

"Yes, she has gone; but I will tell you all that has occurred," and Nellie went on to relate the loss of the schooner, the running into port of the Sea Hawk, betrayal of Rafael, and sailing of the vessel of war, after which followed the death-leap of the five seamen forced to walk the plank from the cliff's top.

Bancroft Edmunds listened attentively to all, now and then asking questions, and when the maiden had finished her story, he said, with enthusiasm:

"I liked your chief immensely as Paul Melville, and I cannot but admire him greatly, now that I know he is Rafael the Rover; he is a noble fellow. And he wished that I should be released?"

"Yes, and I intend to keep my promise to him. After the tornado that has just swept over this island there will doubtless be pleasant weather for some time, and to-night you must sail."

"And how?"

"In a small cat-rigged boat—a stanch little craft, though, and one that will do you good service, for I believe you to be a good seaman."

"I hope I am."

"Well, you must sail early in the night. I will go to the cove and see that the boat is all ready, and fortunately Ramirez brought with him here a good supply of provisions."

"I will get you more, however—a cask for water, and a compass; at dark I will return."

"And this poor fellow?"

"Let him lie where he is. I do not suspect you dread the dead, even though they fall by your hand."

"No, it is the living I dread; I shall be ready."

"*Bueno! Adios!*" and the maiden left the cabin.

CHAPTER XXV.

A DEEP PLOT FOR FREEDOM.

WHEN Pretty Nellie left the retreat in the rocks, she walked rapidly to her own cabin, and entering found that her mother, as usual, was not at home.

Hastily she set to work getting together blankets, provisions and several other articles needful for a short voyage, among which was a compass and sea-glass, an oil suit and storm hat.

These she carefully concealed in a corner, after rolling them up in as small a bundle as was possible.

Having done this she left the cabin and started in an easterly direction from the hamlet over a path that was rugged in the extreme—in fact, she held her way toward a certain point, for there was no path to lead her.

After half an hour's hard climb she came to a huge rock-wall, the bottom of which was overgrown by a dense undergrowth.

Pushing aside the bushes, as though fully acquainted with the locality, Nellie found in front of her a narrow entrance or cavern, which she at once entered, and a few steps brought her out upon the other side of the rock, and upon the shore of a small yet deep creek.

Here a busy scene presented itself to her gaze, for a lugger lay alongside the rock, which served as a pier, and on board of it were two-score of men working hard to fit the craft for sea.

The lugger was flush deck, about ninety feet in length, and was steered by a tiller, the end of which was elaborately carved.

She was very broad in the beam amidships, and was rigged with a fore and main sail, while a stump mast over the taffrail carried a square sail when going before the wind, and was called a "driver."

There was a cabin aft, and a place forward for her crew, and capable of accommodating half a hundred men.

No guns were visible upon the deck, yet a close observer could see that there were four port-holes to a broadside, and a raised deck forward and aft looked strangely as though intended for bow and stern chasers.

On the deck, superintending the work, was Roy Woodbridge, and by his side was Salvador, the keeper, promoted as second officer of the lugger.

Glancing a moment at the busy scene, Nellie moved on down the creek where it spread into a basin, a third of an acre in size, and in which were several small boats.

One of these, a cat-rigged yawl, twenty-five feet in length, the maiden drew alongside of the rock where she stood, by means of a line and pulley attached to the boat, and getting into it, her skillful fingers were soon at work overhauling it from stem to stern.

Ropes were spliced, the mast-stays tightened, several places in the forward deck calked, and the boat, which did not leak, thoroughly cleaned, while the sail was neatly patched, and new reefing nettles put in; in fact no old seaman could have put the little craft in better trim than did this young girl, who, in spite of her sex and years, was a fine sailor.

Having completed her self-imposed task, the maiden retraced her way to the lugger, and seated herself upon a water-cask, of which there were a number upon the shore, while she began to talk with the men.

At last she got up, at an invitation from Roy Woodbridge, to come on board the lugger, and as she did so, a slight kick sent the cask rolling into the creek.

"Never mind, Pretty Nell—we have plenty of them," said the lieutenant, and the maiden stepped on board the lugger and seemed to take considerable interest in the preparations for the sea.

"When do you sail, senor?" she asked.

"By noon to-morrow; the craft has been laid up in ordinary so long she needs a good deal of overhauling; but by noon to-morrow, perhaps sooner, we will be after the Sea Hawk, and we'll make an attempt to save Captain Rafael, if it costs us our lives; he is too noble a fellow to be killed like a dog."

"You are right, senor, and the sooner you get off the better; you should work all night."

"You are right, Nell, and we will do it; that will get us off with the early tide; but you are not going?"

"Yes, senor, I am too restless to remain quiet; but I'll visit you again," and the maiden arose, and leaving the lugger again went down the creek toward the basin, where, as she had expected, she found the cask had floated.

Quickly drawing it ashore, she rolled it under the side of the rock, where a clear stream from a spring in the hills above.

Arranging the bung so as to catch the water, she took from a skiff a long pair of oars and placed them in the yawl, after which she set off on her return to the hamlet, directing her steps toward the commissary cabin.

"Senor Velasquez, I wish some more provisions," she said, addressing the rather good-looking Cuban who acted as store-house keeper or commissary.

"What, so soon again, Pretty Nellie? You have a terrible appetite for one so fair, and cannot certainly live on love."

"No, I hate love—I have had cause; but I want more provisions, Velasquez, for you know, senor, I take care of the sick."

"True, senorita, and you shall have them, although you have already overdrawn your allowance. But, never mind, come whenever you please, for it is a pleasure to see your sweet face, and I will take a reprimand daily from the chief to give you extra allowance. What will you have, senorita?"

Nellie thanked the kind-hearted Cuban and selected a goodly store, which she placed in a sack, and declining the offer of Velasquez to bring them to the cabin, she walked homeward—no, not to her home, but to the retreat in the hills, where, in the concealed crevice in the rock, she placed her load, and then returned to her cabin for the bundle she had left there.

To Nellie's surprise and regret her mother was in the cabin, and as she entered eyed her closely, while she said in her abrupt way:

"Girl, are you, too, mad, that you roam this island by night and by day?"

"No, mother—scenes lately transpiring here have made me nervous; but your face is flushed—are you not well?" and the maiden laid her hand gently upon the forehead.

"Yes, I am well in body, but racked in heart and mind. Rafael is in the hands of the Philistines, girl; the Spaniards will have him ere long, to tear from him his noble life."

"I know it, mother; but he has friends; he has a bold crew, under the gallant Woodbridge, who will go to his aid in a few hours."

"What! say you so, child? Then God bless Roy Woodbridge. He is a noble man. He, like Rafael, was never intended for a buccaneer; but, how do they go, Nellie?"

"In the lugger, over in the secret creek; they are fitting her for sea now."

"Girl, you give me joy. I will go at once to hasten them off, for Rafael must not die—no, he must not die, perish all else that may," and Mad Maud hastily left the cabin, greatly to Nellie's joy, for though she loved her mother deeply, yet she wanted her just then out of the way.

As soon as Mad Maud had disappeared over the hill-tops, Nellie seized her load, and quickly left the cabin, dodging into a clump of timber.

After a walk of half a mile she came to a halt and concealed her bundle in a cavity of a rock, and retracing her steps she sought the hut, formerly occupied by the wounded fisherman, whose dead body she had thrown from the cliff.

The cabin was now deserted, and entering, Nellie took from a chest a roll of what seemed to be, at first glance, a coil of rope, but which, upon closer inspection, proved a rope-ladder.

This, with several small coils of rope, she placed under her shawl, and again went to the thicket and concealed the things in the same place she had the bundle.

"Now I have an hour to wait—until dark—ah, I know what I shall do, for if I remain idle I shall die of nervousness. I will carry these down to the yawl, and get the water-cask on board, so that there will be nothing to delay him."

Suiting the action to the word, many as were the bundles, she raised them in her arms and bore them, by a different path from any she had before taken, toward the shore.

A short walk brought her to an abrupt halt, upon the edge of a rock, which went down some forty feet, and overhung the little basin in which the yawl was anchored.

Attaching her rope-ladder, by ropes, to a tree near the edge, she unrolled it and let the other end fall over the precipice, until it touched the grassy plot at its base.

Then, by means of another rope she had thoughtfully brought with her she lowered the things, one after the other, and then, with perfect fearlessness, went down herself.

Quickly stowing away the articles she had brought, the provisions in one locker, the compass and glass in another, and the oil-suit and blankets in a third, she sprang ashore, and the cask being now full of water, set to work to get it on board.

But it was too great a tax upon her strength, and with disappointment, she was about to give it up, when a voice startled her, with:

"Fair Nellie, can I aid you?"

In dire alarm she looked up and beheld the handsome, boyish, smiling face, yet manly form of Roy Woodbridge before her. Unnoticed he had approached within a few feet of her.

Nellie was blushing; she could utter no word, and seeing her startled look, Roy continued:

"Are you fitting the yawl out as a tender to the lugger, Pretty Nell?"

"I am not," abruptly said the maiden.

"Then for a cruise in it yourself—along with—"

"Who?" defiantly asked the young girl.

"Ah, Nellie, you took one cruise with a faithless wretch, one who would have destroyed your heart, body and soul—beware!" said the buccaneer, sadly, and yet earnestly.

"What do you mean, senor?"

"I simply mean that you trusted Paul Melville, and—"

"Mention him not to me now; he is as the dead."

"Yes, as the dead, you may say; yet, Nellie, I have suspected you of giving him his freedom."

"Then why did you not make the charge against me, and let me suffer the penalty?" and the maiden's eyes flashed defiance.

"No, Nellie, I would not betray you, no matter what you did! but I strongly believe that Paul Melville is now upon this island, concealed by you, and that this yawl is to bear him away this night; and—"

"And what, Senor Woodbridge?"

"And you with him."

"Upon my honor, no! I trusted him once, and he betrayed me; I will never trust him again—never."

"You know not your heart, Nellie."

"I do! I loved him once, or thought I did—I knew not my heart then—and from it I have taken his image. And frankly, senor, I will tell you, now that you have said you would not betray me, that I did aid Paul Melville to escape; but he is not now on the island."

"And yet, how could he have left it? I have looked over the boats large and small, and none have been taken."

"He went in the *carera*."

"Impossible! Captain Rafael sailed in that."

The maiden smiled, and then said:

"Yet he went in the *carera*; shall I tell you how?"

"Yes."

"Well, I will, now that he is out of danger and so is the man who aided him," and Nellie told the officer all of her plan which had proved so successful. In undisguised admiration Roy Woodbridge gazed upon her, a strange look in his eyes, while he said:

"Senorita, you are a wonderful woman. I would that you could go with me to Havana, for your advice and aid would be of the greatest service to the rescue of Captain Rafael."

Nellie seemed pleased at the praise of the officer, and yet troubled; she hardly knew what to do. Night was drawing near, and she feared she could not elude his vigilant eye, to aid Bancroft Edmunds in his flight.

Ere she could reply, the glance of Roy Woodbridge again fell upon the water-cask and the yawl, all ready to put to sea, and he asked:

"Then if Paul Melville has left the island, why these preparations, senorita?"

The maiden looked him straight in the face for an instant, and then said with resolution:

"Roy Woodbridge, I will tell you."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A STARTLING CONFESSION.

"I AM listening, senorita," said Roy Woodbridge, in answer to the remark of Pretty Nellie, that she would tell him why the yawl was fitted for sea.

"Have you forgotten," began the maiden, with hesitation, and evident reluctance, "that when on the Sea Hawk Captain Markham pleaded for the release of his lieutenant, Bancroft Edmunds?"

"By the Lord Harry! I had forgotten it. I remember now, and that you said you held him in your keeping," exclaimed the buccaneer, with some excitement.

"Yes; well, I determined that, if Captain Rafael perished, to deliver the American officer up to the islanders to put to death, as a means of revenge—you see I have had a cruel training here, lieutenant," and the maiden spoke with considerable bitterness.

"Yes, and yet the lily must often be swept over by the storm. Yes, Nellie, you have been reared among rude scenes and ruder men, but your heart has ever been unsullied; you are a noble girl."

The maiden bowed her head a moment, and then said, warmly:

"Indeed I thank you, Roy Woodbridge, and I can say the same of you; but let me go on with my story: that American officer I took prisoner; he fell from the rocks into the sea-channel leading into the basin below this one, and, swept by the tide, suddenly appeared before me, where I was reading in a favorite nook of mine."

"Well, as I told you, I made him prisoner, and, knowing that he had lauded in the discharge of his duty, I could not blame him, and determined to keep him away from the band."

"Ah, I see now."

"You will soon; but remember, I am putting perfect trust in you, Roy Woodbridge."

"You may do so, senorita. Go on; I am deeply interested in your story."

"So I hid him in a secure retreat, and it was to try and exchange him for Captain Rafael and the men of the schooner that I went on board the Sea Hawk as envoy; but you know how I failed."

"You did your duty nobly, Nellie, and with utter fearlessness."

"I wished to. Well, see how matters worked around: Luis Ramirez, seeing that his treachery would become known, fled, and the place of refuge he sought was the very spot where my prisoner was confined—"

"Hal! the interest deepens."

"Yes—well, Luis Ramirez surprised the American, and was himself surprised, and the result was a sword combat, which ended fatally—"

"For the American, of course, poor fellow! I remember the magnificent swordsmanship of Ramirez. And this boat is for the Spaniard to leave the island? Ah, senorita, your heart is too kind."

"Not so, senor. The American beat the Spaniard at his own game—ran him through the body, and—"

"By Jove! that was grand!"

"For the American, yes, senor; but Ramirez deserved his fate."

"He certainly did. Well, about the American officer?"

"He is safe and unwounded, in spite of the skill of Ramirez; he handles a sword splendidly, Senor Woodbridge; as do, I have heard, most of you Americans; you have the reputation of being yourself a perfect swordsman."

"I thank you, senorita; but you are forgetting—"

"The American officer—yes, senor. Well, it was the last wish of Captain Rafael that I should let Lieutenant Edmunds go free. This boat is intended for him, and he leaves to-night," and Nellie's half-defiant manner returned.

"If I do not object, Senorita Nellie."

"You will not—oh! say you will not! Remember, you said you would not betray me," pleaded Nellie.

"Nor will I. He shall go—see!" and raising the water-cask he placed it in the boat, looked at the main-sheet, stays, halyards and tiller to see that all were ship-shape, and then again sprang ashore to the side of the maiden.

"Roy Woodbridge, you are a noble man," and the man looked straight up into her eyes.

Taking her hand, he said, in a tone of sadness:

"Nellie, once I was a noble man, but I have sadly fallen from grace. Would you care to know how I came to sail under the Red Anchor flag?"

"Oh, yes; do tell me."

"Well, Nellie, I will tell you in a few words: I was born on the coast of Virginia; my sister, two years

my junior, and myself being left to a guardian's care, who sent me to college North, and took my sister to live at his home, for he was a widower, with one son, a youth my senior by two years.

"Upon my return, after three years at college, I found my sister had been married a year to the son of my guardian, and they were living at our old home, left to me by the will of my father.

"At college I had been very extravagant, and had drawn heavily upon my guardian; but I was unprepared, being wholly innocent, to learn that I had not only squandered my inheritance, but had committed forgery by getting checks cashed, stating that they were signed by my guardian.

"Nellie, I was arrested, and the checks were produced—the very ones I had had cashed at college, and which I believed genuine, but which I now know were forged by my brother-in-law and sent on to me as a trap in which to catch me, and with the consent of his own father.

"Well, I was sentenced and sent to prison for ten years; but, thirsting for revenge, I plotted night and day to effect my escape, and at last did so, after being six months a prisoner.

"Returning at once to my home, by night, I sent, by a faithful negro, for my brother-in-law to come and see a sick neighbor—met him on the roadside and challenged him to mortal combat.

"He could not escape me, and, trembling, took his place, pistol in hand, ten paces distant from me.

"The negro boy I spoke of gave the word to fire, and my accuser and enemy fell by my hand; but, ere he died he confessed that he had forged the checks, with his father's consent, to get my property, and had poisoned my sister's heart against me—then he died, leaving me no time to prove my innocence, and a negro's testimony was not received, because he was a slave.

"Leaving the body where it lay, and taking the negro with me across the Northern line, that he might not get into trouble, I gave him his freedom and a little money, for I had drawn what I had from bank through the jailer who aided my escape, and then I went to sea before the mast.

"You remember how, seven years ago, I was in Havana one night, penniless and friendless, and saved the life of Captain Rafael, when he was attacked by the guards, and flying with him to his boat escaped to sea in the schooner, which, though a mere boy, he was a second in command of, under his father.

"Now, senorita, you know how I became a buccaner, but you do not know that, from the first moment that I saw you, Nellie, then a mere child, I loved you."

"Loved me, senor?" asked the maiden, in surprise.

"Yes, Nellie; but I then believed that you loved Rafael, and that he returned that love."

"Senor, I did, nay, I do, love Captain Rafael, yet it is not as I would love—"

"Who, Nellie?"

"The man I would be the wife of."

"Yet I believed you did, and hence I never told you of my love. Then, when Rafael went away to the States, I saw that you cared for Paul Melville, as you had for—"

"No, not as I had for Captain Rafael, for my love for him I cannot myself fathom. Had I loved him I would never have been won by Paul Melville."

"That is good logic, Nellie, but I would that you had never known the love of that man."

"Would that I never had; but I was young then."

"Yes; but now, Nellie, now that he has gone, I offer you my love—the whole love of my being, and ask you to become my wife."

"What! Roy Woodbridge, knowing all that is said evil of me, you ask me to be your wife?"

"Yes; I ask you to go with me this night to Havana—to there aid me rescue poor Rafael, and then become my wife. Listen, Nellie. When last in port, I got word from my old home, just as I was thinking of giving up my wild life—my evil, buccaneering life."

"I had written home, to an old friend, the lawyer who had befriended me, and whose life I had once saved from drowning, and his reply gave me great joy, for it told me that my escape from prison and killing of my brother-in-law in a duel had been known, for a planter had been thrown from his horse near the spot where we fought, and stunned, had recovered consciousness just as we arrived upon the field, and remaining quiet, had heard all that had passed. This exonerated me; but the shock killed my poor sister, and dying, she left me all of my property, while our false guardian had fled from the country, to save himself from prosecution by my friends, who made every effort to find and bring me back.

"So, Nellie, you see that there is nothing to prevent my return home, for no one knows me, away from here, as a buccaner; but I wish to carry with me my sweet little Nellie as my wife. You will not say no, will you little girl?"

The maiden was silent for a moment, and then placing both her hands in those of her lover, she said earnestly:

"Roy Woodbridge, I tell you frankly I know of no man I would sooner marry than you. Nay, I have more regard for you than for any man living except Captain Rafael, and, as I have said, I do not love him as a wife should, but as a sister. Yet still there is a wall between us that is never so high."

"Nellie, I know to what you refer. That is in the buried past."

"No, it is in the present, and I will tell you why; I tell you that which but three living persons know. One of them I know not what has become of; the other two are Paul Melville and myself. Roy Woodbridge, I am a wife!"

"You, Nellie?" and the man started back.

"Yes, senor, I am the lawful wife of Paul Melville, and yet I have long allowed dishonor to rest upon my name. Do you remember, senor, several years ago, when the schooner, among other prisoners, brought here a French priest?"

"Yes, *Pere Armand*.

"The same. Well, he married me to Paul Melville, secretly. I hold his written certificate, given me then. He was afterward released by the chief, and went back to France; but my husband made me promise never to reveal the secret, and I never have—never even asked him if I might when he was last

here, for I did not believe I would ever care for another man."

"Have you still that belief, Nellie?"

"No, I love you, Roy Woodbridge, and confess it without shame. It has come upon me within the last hour, though I always admired and cared for you, as you well know; now let us say no more upon this subject. My husband lives, and my love must be buried."

"Perhaps he may not have gotten safely to—"

"Nonsense; the *carera* arrived in safety, for did not Captain Rafael sail in her, and did he not return in the *Sea Hawk*?"

"True. Then, Nellie, I must still love you as beyond my reach?"

"Yes."

"I will, Nellie. As long as you are his wife, I will never breathe a word of love to you again," and sadly the young officer turned away and gazed upon the last rays of the setting sun, as it went down beyond the hill-tops, casting gloomy shadows in the valley below.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE FLIGHT.

For some moments Roy Woodbridge and Nellie stood in silence, the twilight shadows deepening around them, and the waters of the basin growing darker and darker.

Then the maiden spoke:

"You wish me to go to Havana with you, senor?"

"Yes; you can aid me greatly."

"Then I will go if my mother and the chief say yes."

"And if they object?"

"I will go anyhow, for Captain Rafael must not die, if any aid of mine can save him."

"Nobly said! Now I will leave you. Go and bring your prisoner at once on board, while I return to the lugger, for we must get off to-night as there is a fair breeze blowing outside."

"Then it will favor the American. We shall be under way within the hour, and when I have seen him out of the channel I will return to the cabin and soon be on board the lugger."

"Farewell, my brave Nellie, for awhile, and success attend you."

Politely raising his hat, Roy Woodbridge walked away up the bank of the stream and disappeared in the darkness, while Nellie at once mounted the rope-ladder and hastened toward the secret retreat, her heart full of emotion at all that had passed.

Reaching the cabin among the rocks, Nellie found Bancroft Edmunds patiently awaiting her, and the body of Luis Ramirez lying as it had fallen.

"Senor Americano, will you do me the kindness to place that corpse outside? Carry it to a spot near here; I wish the band to know that, in some mysterious way, Luis Ramirez has perished, and that Captain Rafael has been avenged against those who betrayed him."

Without a word Bancroft Edmunds raised the body in his strong arms, and following the maiden from the retreat bore it to a spot some distance from the rock.

"Let it rest here; it will be discovered in the morning," and Nellie paused at the path leading to the buccaneer hamlet.

Bancroft quietly obeyed, laying the corpse by the roadside.

"Now we will return to the retreat for the stores, and make all haste to the boat. You have a good breeze in your favor and a stanch little boat, as well as a good sailer. I have also stowed away on board all that you will need for your cruise."

"Senorita, I thank you more than I can express. One of these days I hope to do you some great service in return," and Bancroft Edmunds spoke warmly.

Nellie made no reply, but leading the way back to the secret retreat she said:

"Here is your bundle, senor, and this I will carry," and she raised the package brought by Luis Ramirez, while the young officer, after urging to carry both, and being repulsed, took up the stores which the kind Velasquez had given to the maiden.

Through the darkness they went, Nellie leading the way, and in half an hour they arrived at the rock, overhanging the basin.

By means of the ropes the stores were lowered, and then, leading the way, the maiden descended the rope-ladder, adown which she was quickly followed by her companion.

"While you put your stores aboard I will get my boat, senor," and Nellie disappeared in the gloom, to appear a few moments later seated in her skiff, her hands upon the oars.

"We have to tow out. You take the helm of your yawl and steer, and I will row."

"No let me take the oars; the work is too heavy for you."

But Nellie would not yield, and Bancroft casting off the line, the yawl moved out into the stream, towed by the light skiff.

Through the channel, not more than forty feet wide, the boats passed, the tide in their favor, and soon they came into another basin.

"Senor, there is where I made you prisoner. We return to the open sea by the same channel that brought you in," and Nellie headed across the basin to the opening through the walls of rock.

In a short while more out of the gloom of the channel-way the boats swept, past the pool into which the young officer had fallen, and thence to the open water, for the sea lay before them.

"Now, senor, I must leave you—the breeze will be good, once you get from under the land's lee," and Nellie arose to cast off the yawl's painter.

"Senorita, I owe you my life, and should I ever have it in my power to return the favors you have done me, believe me I will gladly do so."

"I am sorry you have to run back against the tide, and I sincerely hope you will get into no trouble on my account."

Bancroft Edmunds spoke earnestly and held out his hand, as the two vessels drifted side by side.

The maiden grasped the hand, and said, sadly:

"I did but my duty, senor. May you have a safe voyage, and may your life be a happy one. Farewell."

The American quickly bent, imprinted a kiss upon the little hand he held, and the boats drifted apart.

In the twinkling of an eye the huge sail of the yawl was raised, the sheet thrown to the wind, the

compass drawn from the locker and placed by the side of a lantern, already lighted, and the adventurous young sailor started upon his perilous flight, alone upon the broad bosom of the waters.

Watching his departure, until the breeze caught his sail, and caused his boat to careen well over and dash swiftly along, Pretty Nellie then turned her skiff and headed back into the channel.

Though pulling against the tide it was not yet running strong, and she sent her light skiff swiftly back the way she had come and was soon at the spot from which she had started.

Hauling her skiff well up on the beach, she ascended the ladder, drew it up after her, and then sought a high point from whence she could overlook the sea, and by the aid of a glass, which she always carried with her, she beheld the little sail-boat far out from the land, rapidly skimming along.

She could not discern him who held the light craft on its course; but she knew he was there, making a bold effort for freedom.

Convinced that the yawl had gained sufficient start to hold her way well against the lugger, if it should sail within the next two hours, Nellie ran hastily down to her cabin, and there found her mother nervously pacing the floor.

"Well, girl, you are out late."

"Yes, mother, but I have been arranging to leave the island for a while."

"What mean you?" eagerly asked the woman.

"I mean to go to Havana in the lugger. The Senor Woodbridge says I can greatly aid him in the attempted rescue of Captain Rafael."

"Oh, Nellie, my daughter, do this and I will bless you! Yes, go with him—go with him," said the woman, coming close to the girl, and laying her hands upon her shoulders.

"And will you ask the chief?"

"No, no, no! He would refuse. Go, and I will say you have gone, when too late to stop you. There, let me get you ready," and Mad Maud bustled about, and from various boxes took out wearing apparel, and put them in a trunk, until Nellie found herself possessed of a very rich wardrobe.

"Now, girl, here is gold for you. See, I put it in your chest—plenty of it—and you must not spare it. Let it flow like water, so you get Rafael out of that accursed Moro's dungeons. Now go to the lugger and send a man after your luggage; I will wait here for him."

In ten minutes more Nellie was at the creek bank, and met there by Roy Woodbridge, she was escorted on board to the little cabin, which he had already fitted up most comfortably for her reception.

"There, Nellie, you can make yourself at home; but what did your mother say?"

"Gave her consent most willingly; in fact, seemed most anxious for me to go, and packed me a chest which I promised to send after."

"I will let two men go at once to the cabin for it. Now I must go up and get my last orders from the old chief. I will return in an hour, and then we will get to sea, for all is ready," and the buccaneer left Nellie to her own thoughts and went to see his chief; but for only a short while was the maiden alone, as the seamen soon returned with her baggage, accompanied by Mad Maud.

Then between mother and daughter followed a long, earnest conversation, the poor woman seeming no longer mad, as she suggested to Nellie plans for the escape of Rafael, and ended by saying:

"Here, my child, if you should need more gold take these; they are worth the ransom of a prince. They were my wedding present—see!" and Mad Maud placed in the hands of Nellie a necklace of beautiful diamonds, each worth a thousand *pesos*.

"Let them all go if need be, to save him; he must not die! Now I must go ashore; farewell!" and stooping, the woman pressed a hearty kiss upon Nellie's brow and was gone.

"We have left the creek now; will you come on deck?"

Nellie started; she stood just where her mother had left her—the diamond necklace still clasped in her hand.

"Yes, I like not the cabin when I can breathe fresh air," and thrusting the necklace into her bosom she went on deck with Roy Woodbridge, who had called to her from the helm, at which he stood.

Slowly, with the boats aboard, the lugger was moving down the channel, and in an hour's time had gained the open sea.

Then the sails were spread, and swiftly over the waters sped the really fleet vessel, all on board anxious to aid in the rescue of Rafael from the terrible death that threatened him in Havana.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DENOUNCED.

WHEN Bancroft Edmunds left the pirate isle, he felt in his heart that he should arrive safely at the end of his voyage, and his anticipations, after several days of buffeting with the waves, sleepless hours by day and night, and arduous work, were realized, for he stood in, one pleasant afternoon, toward the coast of Cuba, amid the banks of which glimmered the white walls of a *casu de campo*, among the cocon and palm trees.

"Yes, I will seek the hospitality of yonder house for the night; and if the wind is fair, stand on to Havana to-morrow; if against me, I will get a steed and go on by land; but now, I am actually worn out," he muttered to himself, as he headed his boat into a little reef-sheltered harbor, down to the shores of which sloped the grounds surrounding the *hacienda*, or *campo de casa*, before referred to, and which was evidently the house of some wealthy planter.

Running alongside of a small pier, he sprung out; made his boat's painter fast to an iron ring, and ascended the walk toward the *hacienda*, upon the piazza of which he saw, as he approached, two persons seated.

Drawing nearer he observed that one was a gentleman in uniform—the other a maiden, tastefully dressed, and wearing the Spanish veil about her head and shoulders.

A few steps nearer and a glad cry greeted him, in silvery accents and the Spanish tongue.

"*¡Santissima! ¡es el Senor Edmunds!*"

As she spoke the lady started from the piazza and stepped the American's hand, while he said pleasantly:

"And is it really you, Senorita Inez? I really expected not this pleasure."

"Then you came not here to see me? I had flattered myself that you had."

Senorita Revilla, I did intend to visit you upon the return from our cruise; but now I come alone and—"

"From where, Senor Edmunds?"

"From a buccaneer island. I escaped, through the kindness of a noble maiden, only three nights ago; but that gentleman wears my country's uniform. I see," and Bancroft motioned toward the gentleman who was on the piazza with Inez Revilla, and who had walked a few paces distant.

"Yes, he is a naval officer of your country. Come, I will make you acquainted, for you seem not to know each other. Senor Melville, this is an old friend of mine, the Senor Edmunds."

Paul Melville, for it was none other, stepped forward, a smile of welcome upon his face and his hand extended, while he said:

"Senor Edmunds, I am most happy. You are an officer on the Sea Hawk, I believe, to which I am ordered?"

But Bancroft Edmunds stood like a statue, his bright eye fixed upon the man before him, and his voice was deep and stern as he said:

"Mr. Melville, though an officer of our service, and my superior in rank, I care not to take your hand, sir," and turning to the astonished Inez, he continued:

"Senorita Revilla, if this man is a guest of yours, I will bid you *adieu*."

"Explain yourself, sir! There surely is some mistake!" said Paul Melville, white with rage.

"There is no mistake, sir. Senorita Revilla, you are entertaining a villain."

With an angry cry Paul Melville sprung forward, his hand upon a concealed weapon in his breast; but like a flash of light Bancroft Edmunds dealt him a blow that laid him in his length upon the ground.

Pale with dread and excitement, Inez Revilla knew not what to say or do, and turning to her, Bancroft said:

"Pardon me, senorita, I was perhaps hasty; but Paul Melville, though an American officer, was for years a buccaneer, and in escaping from them he attempted to take the life of a young girl who aided him."

"With a story of having been a captive to the corsairs, he gained an appointment in the United States navy, for he is really an excellent seaman, and came to Cuba for the avowed purpose of betraying those who had once been his friends. All this I know; it was told me only three days since. Need I say more? You know me, and know whether I would willfully slander any one—especially a brother officer."

Inez Revilla had known Bancroft Edmunds for two years, and he had been a great favorite of hers. Paul Melville she had met but several days before in Havana, and, at the invitation of General Muril Sebastian, he had come out to the *hacienda* for a short visit, the old officer having taken a great fancy to the American lieutenant.

Hence, when Bancroft Edmunds made the charge he did, Inez Revilla believed him, and turned coldly toward Paul Melville, who having arisen to his feet, stood gazing upon them, with the manner and look of a tiger about to spring upon its prey; but he felt that Bancroft Edmunds was more than a match for him, and with a bitter curse he turned away, walked a few paces, and then wheeling, said savagely:

"Lieutenant Edmunds, you shall answer for this. My address is at Pedro Nunez's *pulperia*. When you come to Havana send me your card—if you are not a coward."

Bancroft bowed formally and turned to Inez, while, seeking the stables, Paul Melville was soon after seen dashing away on horseback, at the full speed of the animal he rode.

"And your uncle, the general, he is here with you, senorita?"

"Yes, Senor Edmunds; he is out over the plantation now. He will soon return. Since my capture, you know, by that buccaneer, Ramirez, my uncle will not allow me to remain here without his personal care. You did not congratulate me upon my escape."

"No; but I intended to. Your having been stolen from your home distressed me greatly, senorita, and I was rejoiced to learn, just before we left Havana, that some gallant planter had rescued you. And Luis Ramirez was then your kidnapper?" and Bancroft gazed earnestly into the maiden's face.

"Yes; he came here in a small vessel and stole me and my old nurse, as we were on the beach one day—oh! I do fear that man so."

"Senorita Revilla, you need fear him no more; he is dead."

"Dead! Luis Ramirez dead? It cannot be; you must be mistaken, senor."

"No, he died by my hand. We had a *duello* and I ran him through. I had often heard of him, yet never met him; but after his death I learned who he was."

"Where did this happen, senor?" asked Inez, with considerable feeling in tone and manner.

"On the pirate isle, where I have been for a short while a prisoner, and from which I was released by the very young girl whom Paul Melville sought to slay."

"You surprise me, and now that you have made me your *confidante*, I will tell you a secret; the man who saved me from Luis Ramirez, took me from the little cabin where that man held me prisoner, and restored me to my uncle, was none other than Rafael the Rover."

"What! I thought it was a Don Bernado some body, a planter?"

"So it was reported here in your Don Rafael; you not a word of this to my uncle."

"No, your own trust must lead, Senorita Inez, the Rover is now in trouble."

"What mean you, Senor Americano?" asked Inez, nervously.

"I will tell you, and in his distress he has my sympathy, for he is not, after all, the very devil that he is painted, but on the contrary a man of many noble qualities. Now that he has treated you so well, I positively have a high regard for him. Listen attentively, and I will tell you all that I know about Rafael the Rover."

In a few words Bancroft Edmunds made known all about the daring part that Rafael had played on

Paul Melville, and his own capture by Nellie and release, with all that he had heard about the young buccaneer chief.

The loss of the Curse of the Sea, as told him by Nellie, the betrayal of Rafael by Ramirez, and the young chief's noble sacrifice, with all that he had heard of Paul Melville, he told his attentive listener, for the maiden drank in every word.

"And Captain Rafael is now on the Sea Hawk, bound for Havana, you say?" asked Guy earnestly.

"Yes, and sentenced to the worst of deaths. It is a pity for him to die thus."

"A crime, rather say, senor; but here comes my uncle. He will be glad to welcome you, and tomorrow you will drive on to Havana with us, for I must be in the city at once; but remember, not a word to my uncle about Don Bernado Rosalia being Rafael the Rover."

"I will not betray you, Senorita Inez," and Bancroft arose to greet General Sebastian, who just then came forward, a smile of welcome upon his face, for the young officer was well known to him.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE DUELLO.

WHEN Paul Melville had returned from the buccaneer island, in the guise of the wounded fisherman, it had been his intention to report on board the Sea Hawk, after a day or two, to recuperate from all that he had gone through; but, led away by the hope of capturing Rafael the Rover, he had been inveigled into a plot by the good-hearted Martin, who, determined that the young buccaneer captain should not be caught on board the sloop-of-war, had executed a well-conceived plan to get the lieutenant held in custody for several days—or, at least, until after the American war-craft had sailed.

The plan worked to a charm, and the keeper of the *pulperia*, where Paul Melville was held a prisoner, carried out his part of the performance as directed, while Ed Martin, the ex-buccaneer, sailed from Havana for the United States as soon as one of the sentinels who guarded the lieutenant reported that his prisoner had been gagged, bound and carried outside of the walls by night and left there.

Whether the worthy Martin continued his reformation, married and settled down, is not known; but it is to be hoped that he did.

As for Paul Melville, left alone in the country, his mouth still gagged and feet bound, he could neither cry out nor run after the *volante* that had dropped him so unceremoniously by the roadside.

But after having with some difficulty, removed the gag and unbound his feet, he started on his way back to Havana, arriving in the early morning, and surprising Pedro Nunez, the host, by again appearing after a mysterious absence of several days.

The first care of Paul Melville was to find out about the Sea Hawk, and he cursed every saint in the calendar for his ill-luck when he discovered that the vessel had sailed without him, for it was through striking the buccaneers a death-blow that he hoped to gain a distinguished name and increased rank.

That they would perhaps charge him with having once been a pirate he did not doubt; but who would believe them?

No, his comrades would feel that it was a plot against him for revenge, and they would not believe the pirates.

Making himself known to the consul in Havana, he at once entered into a round of gaiety, and it was at a ball that he met Inez Revilla, and learning of her being of noble family, and possessed of vast wealth, he set about his plans to make her his wife, and his pleasant manners soon won the friendship of both the maiden and her uncle, who invited him with them out to the *hacienda* of the maiden, some leagues from Havana.

How this friendship abruptly ended, by the accidental arrival of Bancroft Edmunds, has been already seen, and bitterly cursing the young officer, Paul Melville had mounted his horse and ridden back to Havana at full speed.

Fearing that arrest might follow upon the charge of piracy, he made known to his host his position, and told him to give him some secret chamber, and himself see all that called for him.

This Pedro Nunez readily promised—it was his duty to protect his guests, and the officer had quite won his heart, besides being presented to him by a worthy friend, the Spanish captain.

Therefore, when the servant, the following day, said to the host:

"A gentleman to see Senor Melville," the host at once went to see who the caller was.

Before him stood a fine-looking young man, clad as an officer in the American navy.

"How can I serve you, senor?"

"I would know if Lieutenant Paul Melville is here?"

"I think I can obtain his address, senor. Any message left for him?"

"Well, give him this card, and say, if I do not have an answer to it by nighttime, I will look him up with a squad of marines."

"*Si, senor*," bowed Pedro Nunez, and as the officer turned from the door, he muttered:

"That young man is in no amiable mood, and he doubtless does not reverence the Senor Melville."

"Here is a card, senor; the gentleman left it with no pleasant message," and Pedro presented himself at the secret chamber, where Paul Melville then was.

Taking the card he glanced at it and read the address of Bancroft Edmunds.

"What message left he, Pedro?"

It was repeated, word for word and the ex-buccaneer's face slightly changed color, while he asked:

"Is the American sloop-of-war Sea Hawk in your port, Pedro?"

"No, senor; she had not arrived this morning."

"Then I shall meet this fellow, for he cannot intend to arrest me, and with him out of the way there will be no other person to make a charge against me, unless it be some of the band, and they will not be believed. Bancroft Edmunds evidently has some deeper reason against me than my having been accused of being a buccaneer; but how is it he arrives on the coast in an open boat, when he sailed in the Sea Hawk?"

"There is a mystery about this, and I must solve it. Now to find a friend, and send him with a challenge to that impudent young officer. Ah, I remember; I will ask that Spanish naval officer whom I

met the other night—Captain Felipe Valiente, Pedro."

"Senor."

"Send me a messenger, please."

In a few moments a servant arrived and was dispatched with a note to Captain Felipe Valiente, a handsome young Spaniard, who commanded an armed cruiser then in port.

In an hour's time the Spaniard arrived at the room of Paul Melville, who greeted him pleasantly and said:

"Senor capitan, I am sorry to ask a favor of one whom I know so slightly; but I am a stranger here, comparatively, and having gotten into a quarrel with another officer, I beg that you will serve me in the affair."

"With pleasure, senor; when and how can I serve you?" replied the Spaniard, perfectly willing to be mixed up in a *duello*.

"Here is the address of the gentleman, and I beg that you will at once call on him and have a time and place of meeting, with weapons to be used, arranged."

"The Senor Edmunds? I know him; he is a great favorite in Havana society. I thought he was away in the Sea Hawk?" and the Spaniard again glanced at the card.

"He has returned, senor."

"Then I will go at once," and the Spanish captain left the house, to return within the hour, a pleasant smile upon his face.

"All is arranged, Senor Melville. I saw the Senor Edmunds, and he referred me to his second, Captain Eduard Alfuerte, an *aide* to General Sebastian. We meet at sunset, beyond the walls of the city, in a spot I know well, having once been wounded there, and once killed my adversary there."

"And the weapons?" somewhat eagerly asked Paul Melville.

"He seemed most indifferent; he must handle a sword equally well with a pistol, and it was left to you to decide."

"He certainly is indifferent. It shall be pistols then, and, Captain Valiente, I am a dead-shot, as you shall see."

"Well, senor, at what time do we start? It is now nearly time."

"I am at your service, captain. Here are my weapons."

A *volante* was at once called, and the two men left the tavern together, Paul Melville carrying a pair of swords beneath his light cloak, while Captain Valiente had his pistol-case.

A rapid drive of less than an hour brought them to the designated spot, just as two horsemen drew rein.

"There he is, and his indifference is remarkable, to come here mounted. Does he not know that the exercise will do much to destroy his aim?" said Captain Valiente.

Paul Melville made no reply, but quietly saluted the two gentlemen as they approached.

Bancroft Edmunds paid no attention to the salute, but bowed pleasantly to Felipe Valiente, while his companion, the young officer who had met Rafael and Inez when the Rover returned the maiden to her uncle's care, saluted each of the other side with equal respect.

In a few moments the preliminaries were arranged and the two men took their positions—Paul Melville dark, scowling, yet cool, and Bancroft Edmunds seeming wholly indifferent.

The pistols were placed in their hands, and Captain Valiente gave the word to fire.

Ere the word had left his lips Paul Melville fired, and Bancroft Edmunds stepped back twice, but instantly came back to his former position.

"Great God! have I missed him?" cried Paul Melville, and he shrunk back several paces.

"Back to the line, senor!" exclaimed Edward Alfuerte, in ringing tones, raising his own pistol; and, cowering Paul Melville obeyed, and once more faced the man before him—a man who stood cold, calm and threatening, his face pale, his pistol still hanging down in his hand.

"Senor, you have your fire now," continued the second of Bancroft Edmunds, gazing with some contempt upon Paul Melville for having shrunk from the line.

Calmly did Bancroft Edmunds raise his pistol until on a level, and then, as his eyes glanced along the glittering barrel, he pulled the trigger.

With the report Paul Melville fell dead—shot through the brain.

CHAPTER XL.

IN THE MORO.

WHEN Bancroft Edmunds returned from the fatal field, where his hand had taken the life of a brother officer and countryman, he drove with Captain Eduard Alfuerte to the Moro Castle, and was soon in the presence of the beautiful Inez.

"Senor, is it over?" asked the maiden, eagerly.

"Yes, senorita."

"And the result?"

"He is dead."

"And you are not wounded?" anxiously asked the maiden.

"I will show you. You gave me this, ere I left, and said it might protect me," and the young officer took from an inner pocket a small gold-encased miniature.

But the gold was deeply dented, and in it was imbedded a leaden bullet, while the glass was shattered into atoms, yet the likeness remained unsullied, unbroken.

"See, you have saved my life. The ball struck here—this was over my heart, where your image, Inez, has been since we first met; but this is no time to tell you of my love, coming to you as I do with my hand stained in the blood of a fellow-being; yet, Inez, I knew him in his true light, and he had doubly wronged one who had served me greatly, and I took upon myself to be his executioner, for he would have been tried and condemned as a buccaneer."

"Yet, between us rests the secret, and for the honor of our service I would have it remain unknown that he was other than was believed; but when the Sea Hawk comes into port, I will report to Captain Markham the whole affair, while the public must believe that we had a quarrel which ended in Paul Melville's death. What said your uncle of the affair?"

"He believed that I was the cause, and I so let him

believe, for, after telling him the other day that Lieutenant Melville had been called away suddenly to Havana, I could not give him any other explanation without your consent; but oh! how glad I am that your life is safe."

"That life shall now be devoted to you, Inez; my heart has long been yours; do with it as you will."

The answer of Inez Revilla was to raise her lips to those bending over her, and then and there was sealed a betrothal between the beautiful Spanish maiden and gallant American officer.

After a few moments of silence, for both were in too happy a reverie to speak, Inez said:

"Come, I have something to show you."

Leading the way to the casement she pointed to the harbor, far below them, dotted with a thousand lights from anchored vessels.

"Do you recognize that vessel—the one lying close in shore?"

"The Sea Hawk! She has at last arrived. Now, senorita, I must leave you."

"The vessel was signaled, and arrived an hour ago; but I would not have told you had I known that you would have left me," said Inez, softly.

"Duty compels me to leave you. On the morrow I will see you—perhaps to-night again," and Bancroft Edmunds hastily took his departure, happy in having won the love of the lovely girl, and yet glowing over the duty before him, of making known the death of Paul Melville at his hands.

"Sea Hawk ahoy!" sung out the young officer, as he neared the vessel in a shore boat.

"Ahoy!"

"I would come on board."

"Ay, ay, come alongside," answered Lieutenant Redmond, and turning to Fred Ramsey he said:

"That voice sounds like Bancroft Edmunds's."

"It is Lieutenant Edmunds," cried the midshipman, as the sight of a battle-lantern fell upon that officer, as he ascended the gangway, and he sprang forward to meet him.

"Now I am dished. Paul Melville will next appear, and I'll have to drop back two grades again," growled Ross Redmond; but he greeted Bancroft with a forced smile, and bade him enter the cabin, where he would find Captain Markham.

The commander of the Sea Hawk, with Mabel, sat at tea, when Bancroft Edmunds entered, and his sudden and unexpected appearance brought them to their feet with exclamations of surprise and joy.

"Now, Edmunds, take a seat and let us know all about your strange adventures, and how it is that we find you here?" said Captain Markham, after the greeting was over.

In a few words as possible Bancroft Edmunds then told of his fall into the water, his capture by Pretty Nellie, and eventual release by that maiden, and landing at the *casa del campo* of General Sebastian, all of which the listeners heard with the greatest interest, especially his combat with Luis Ramirez in the secret cabin.

"And now, Captain Markham, I have a most disagreeable statement to make, and you must be the judge as to whether I acted right in the matter," said the young officer, in a tone that showed he had something serious to relate.

"I have never known you to go wrong yet, Edmunds; but go on."

"Well, sir, during my stay on the island I had every proof that Lieutenant Paul Melville was not all that he had been represented."

"How mean you?"

"Well, sir, his captivity among the buccaneers, some years ago, was not forced, but willing."

"Great Heavens! this is a serious charge."

"It is, sir, yet a true one; he was an officer among the buccaneers, and escaped from the island with the avowed intention of leaguering himself with another band and destroying those among whom he had lived or becoming the chief of all."

"In his escape he attempted the life of the one who had aided him, through her love of him, and left her, as he believed, to drown—"

"How know you this, Edmunds?"

"From her own lips, sir; it was this girl that saved my life."

"Was she the one that was on the Sea Hawk, disguised as a youth?" asked Nellie.

"The same, Miss Markham, and a noble girl she is."

"A fearless one, too. Why, she spoke to me as boldly as though I was a mere seaman. I knew not until afterward, when it was whispered around the vessel, that she was not a boy," said Captain Markham.

"Well, sir, she is a noble girl and in some way has been remarkably well educated for one who has been reared among buccaneers; but to continue, Captain Markham, knowing all that I did about Paul Melville, I could easily understand how he entered the service of the United States, when he had, for some reason given up his plan of attack against his former friends, the buccaneers, and with an eye to fame and rank, determined to lead in an attack on the island—the maiden said for the purpose of getting possession of the gold which he knew was secretly buried on the isle, and which would give him vast wealth."

"It seems plausible, I must admit."

"It is the case, sir, for when we were in port Paul Melville arrived in Havana, and put up at a *pulperia* kept by Pedro Nunez."

"There he met none other than Rafael, in disguise, who at once recognized his old comrade, got him in his power and carried him to the island where he was condemned to be hung as a traitor. But for what he had been to this girl, called by the buccaneers Pretty Nellie and Queen of the Isle, she determined to rescue him, which she did by a daring and ingenious plan, which sometime I will make known to you. Thus Melville returned again to Havana, and yet did not come on board the Sea Hawk, which was then in port, and which Rafael boarded in the character of a lieutenant."

"When I landed at the *hacienda* of General Sebastian I found there Paul Melville, and denouncing him, a quarrel ensued which ended in a challenge from him, which I accepted for reasons I will make known to you; namely, for the honor of the service I deemed it best that none should know Paul Melville in his true light other than those it was necessary should be told of it."

"And the challenge, Edmunds?"

"I accepted, and we fought that evening at sunset, outside the walls, and with pistols at ten paces."

"The result?" and Captain Markham breathed hard.

"He fired before the word was out, and I killed him."

"This is a bad business, Edmunds."

"True, sir, and I have come to surrender myself."

"You mistake me; I do not hold you under arrest."

Under the circumstances it is best that it should be as it is; but it is a bad business that our service should have been so disgraced. Now I will give out that the affair was a quarrel forced upon you by Melville, and acquit you. But I will communicate the whole affair, with your written statements, and the testimony of Rafael, if he will give it, to the Secretary of the Navy, and there the matter will drop. You say no one else knew of his treachery?"

"One other, sir," and Bancroft Edmunds slightly colored.

"He can be trusted, can he?"

"She can; it is the lady to whom I am betrothed, and before whom I denounced Melville."

"I knew not that you had been so successful, Edmunds. I congratulate you; but now I will have Rafael brought in and question him regarding this traitor lieutenant, and then I wish you to accompany me, for I shall escort the prisoner to the Moro and turn him over to General Sebastian."

Leaving the cabin Captain Markham went on deck to have the prisoner ordered before him, and the boat in readiness to convey the party on shore, and while he was gone Mabel, in a few hasty words, told Bancroft Edmunds how nobly the buccaneer captain had acted in saving the Sea Hawk and then offering himself as a sacrifice for his crew.

"I know all. The maiden told me. He is a noble fellow, buccaneer though he be."

"And will you see him die?" eagerly asked Mabel.

"I fear that he must. The Governor-general will never pardon him, Miss Markham."

"I know it; he must be rescued without a pardon."

Ere Mabel could say more Captain Markham returned, and behind him, unguarded, yet heavily ironed, came Rafael the Rover, perfectly calm.

At a glance he saw all who were in the cabin, and refusing the seat offered him by Bancroft he remained standing.

"Buccaneer," began Captain Markham, "I would ask you a few questions, ere you go from my hands into the dungeons of the Moro."

"I am listening, sir."

"Do you know aught of the man whom you pretended to be when you came on board this vessel?"

"Of Paul Melville? Yes."

"Who, and what is he?"

"He is a villain, who, when his life was saved by me, sided with us for years, and outdid my most cruel men in cruelty."

"And more you know of him?"

"Yes; he fled from our island, with the avowed intention of bringing other buccaneers to attack and rob us, and declare himself chief; but, changing his mind he entered the service of the United States, receiving a commission for some gallant act, for he was no coward, and volunteered to his government to come out to the Indies and drive the buccaneers from these waters."

"You made him a prisoner a short while since, I believe?"

"I did, sir; and he was tried by our laws and sentenced to be hung; but he escaped, and is now in Havana, I believe."

"You mistake; he is dead."

"Paul Melville dead? Then the earth has one scoundrel less to curse it."

"And in a few days you will be as he is—dead!"

"It may be; I expect no mercy," proudly answered the chief; and piqued at not making his prisoner tremble before him, Captain Markham said:

"Now, sir, I go to deliver you into the hands of General Sebastian."

"I am ready, sir."

A moment after the three men left the cabin, Mabel managing to slip a piece of paper into the hands of Rafael, as he turned to bow farewell to her.

Half an hour later Rafael the Rover was in one of the lowest dungeons of the Moro Castle, and bound down with double irons to the stone floor.

CHAPTER XLII.

A WOMAN'S PLOT.

THE cause of the Sea Hawk's delay in reaching Havana was on account of having gone in chase of a swift-sailing schooner, sighted a few leagues from the pirate isle and believed to be a buccaneer craft.

After a long chase the sloop-of-war gave up the pursuit and stood on her former course to Havana, arriving after nightfall, and dropping anchor under the very shadow of the Moro Castle.

About an hour after the arrival of the Sea Hawk, and closely following upon the departure of the prisoner for the Moro, a lugger came into the harbor slowly, and dropped anchor but a cable's length from the sloop-of-war, as though desiring to be in close vicinity to the vessel-of-war.

Shortly after the lugger had come to a stop, a small boat put off from its side, and rowed toward the Sea Hawk, and a boyish voice hailed and asked to come on board.

"I would see your commander, senor," said a slender youth, with blonde hair and mustache and dark eyes, as he stepped on board.

"He is ashore, sir; how can I serve you?" asked Fred Ramsey, who, in the absence of his superior officer, and at the request of Lieutenant Redmond, was acting as officer of the deck while that gentleman was taking a rap below.

"We were chased into port, senor, by a buccaneer, and I thought if your commander would put to sea he could catch the rascal."

"Ah! this is serious. I will speak to the captain upon his return, and we will decide what to do. Am obliged to you, my fine fellow, for the information," said Fred, who felt his importance immensely.

"Mr. Ramsey, please send that person into the cabin; I will speak with him."

It was Mabel's voice, and the midshipman started, while he muttered:

"She'll command this craft yet;" and then aloud he called out:

"Ay, ay! Miss Markham. Here, sir, go down into the cabin, and you'll see an angel."

The last was said *otto voce*, as the youth obeyed with alacrity the order to enter the cabin.

Mabel saw this youth enter, and in spite of the

Monde wig and mustache, and the rude seaman's suit, recognized Pretty Nellie.

"You have risked much to come here," she said, in a low tone.

"You know me then?"

"Yes, as the maiden who came on this vessel at the buccaneer isle. What are you to Rafael the Rover?" and there was a tinge of jealousy in the tone, which Nellie at once detected, and quickly answered:

"I am his friend—one who would save him—one who would not have him die—I am nothing else to Rafael, lady."

"Nor would I see him die—he must not, and I am glad you have come. When did you arrive?"

"I will trust you, lady. I came in the lugger lying near. There are with me three score of hearts and hands to aid in the rescue of their chief, for he is beloved by all. I came here, lady, to see if he had been taken to the Moro?"

"Yes, twenty minutes since."

"Too bad! we would have attempted his rescue at any cost; but we were delayed, dodging a Spanish vessel-of-war that pursued us. Oh! how can we save him?"

Mabel remained a moment silent, and then, while her eyes flashed with hope, she said:

"Your lugger lies near here, you say?"

"Yes, lady—a cable's length away."

"And your crew dare do anything to save their chief?"

"Ay, lady."

"Then I have a plan; listen. Let your officer and yourself dress in the uniforms of a lieutenant and midshipman of our navy, assuming the names of Lieutenant Ross Redmond, and Midshipman Fred Ramsey."

"Then rig out a boat's crew in the seaman's attire of the United States navy and half a dozen men as marines—do you understand?"

"Perfectly, lady."

"Have you any place where you can get the uniforms?"

"We have them on the lugger, lady. We have to be prepared with disguises of all kinds."

"That is excellent. Now, when you have done this, get into your largest boat and row ashore at the stone stairway of the Castle; but not until you have seen the Sea Hawk's boat return with her officers."

"Yes, lady."

"Then go boldly up to the Moro gate, let your officer send his card—I will give you the card—ah, here it is—Lieutenant Ross Redmond, United States Navy," and Mabel took it from a book, where it was serving as a mark.

"Send this card to General Muriel Sebastian, the commandant, and say to him that it has been discovered that Lieutenant Paul Melville was at one time a buccaneer in reality, and not a captive, as he represented, and it was on this account that the duel between him and Lieutenant Bancroft Edmunds was fought to-day—"

"A duel, lady? and between Paul Melville and Lieutenant Edmunds?" cried the disguised Nellie, in dire alarm.

"Yes—and—"

"Oh! tell me, for the sake of the Virgin Mother! which was slain?" and Nellie stretched forth her hands pleadingly.

"Paul Melville."

"Oh! God, I thank Thee! Then I am free—lady, Paul Melville was my husband," and the poor girl sunk down upon a divan; but quickly recovering herself, she continued:

"But go on, lady; think not of me now; ask Lieutenant Edmunds some time to tell you all—he knows. Now tell me, what shall I say to General Sebastian?"

Surprised at the girl's wonderful self-control, Mabel, who had pitied her greatly at first, fearful that she had loved Paul Melville, now continued:

"Say to General Sebastian to keep the matter quiet, Captain Markham begs, until he sees him to-morrow and he will explain all; but, for the sake of Lieutenant Edmunds, he begs that he will let him bring Rafael the Rover back on board the Sea Hawk, to take his written testimony of what he knows of the former life of Paul Melville, and that the prisoner shall be returned by midnight at furthest."

"Lady, you have saved him! Boldness will carry us safely through, but does no one at the castle know the two officers we would represent?"

"No; they both came to the Sea Hawk only a short while ago, from a vessel that landed to bring them, as my father had lost a number of his officers on his last cruise against the Caribbean corsairs, several months ago."

"It is well; I will return at once to the lugger and make our arrangements; and, lady, Captain Rafael shall know to whom he owes his life. Now farewell, and the Virgin ever care for you, dear lady."

"Stay! If this plan fails see me again, but in some other disguise, and we will plan some other way for his escape."

"Bless you, senorita! Adios."

"Mr. Ramsey, see this young gentleman to his boat, and do not mention this visit to my father, as we have had pirate hunting enough of late, and I have no desire to go to sea again to-night."

"Ay, ay, Miss Markham," and again under his breath he added: "She is right; I want a rest now in this gay town, where the men are all small, I've heard, and the women all beautiful. This way, young man, and, I think, under the circumstances, we will not go after your buccaneer, but leave it for cruisers to do. We have done our share of late."

"Yes, senor; *buenas noches!*" and the supposed sailor went over the side into his boat and rowed rapidly back to the lugger.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A DESPERATE GAME FOR LIFE.

WHEN Bancroft Edmunds had said to Inez, he would perhaps return to the castle that night, he little knew the sorrow his second visit would cause her, when he came, accompanied by Captain Markham, and with Rafael the Rover as a prisoner.

Fortunately General Sebastian was absent, gone to see the Governor-general on business, and Inez was saved from then betraying her knowledge of the prisoner, as he stood before her, no sign upon his stern, handsome face showing that he had ever before seen her.

"Senor, I regret my uncle's absence; I will call

Captain Alfuerie, and have him convey the prisoner to his cell," and as Inez glided by Rafael, she gave him a quick glance, while her lips parted with the words:

"Have hope!"

Rafael caught the low voice, and his eyes flashed, yet his face remained cold and stern as before.

"Be seated, seniors; my uncle will return soon perhaps. Ah! here is Captain Alfuerie. *Senor Capitan*, Captain Markham has brought you a prisoner; please see that he is confined securely until my uncle returns to dispose of him."

"Si, *senorita*," and Rafael the Rover was led away to his cell.

"Now, seniors, have wine with me."

Both Captain Markham and Bancroft Edmunds drank a health to their fair hostess, and then took their departure, pleading an engagement in town.

"We will have the boat meet us at one of the upper piers, while we drop into the American coffee-house, and then go to the *pulperia* after the effects of Paul Melville. As his commander I can claim them, and I will have his body sent on board the *Sea Hawk* for burial."

"Yes, sir; his papers may throw some light upon his past life, and if we are to keep the affair a secret, he should have the burial honors due his rank," quietly replied Bancroft Edmunds, and the two officers then went down to the stone stairway, and ordered the coxswain of the waiting cutter to meet them at another pier, after which they started for the city.

They had been gone but a short while when a boat landed at the stairway.

It contained six oarsmen, and ten other persons besides—two of them being naval officers of the United States, judging from their uniform, as seen by the lantern above the stairs, and a third dressed as a marine sergeant. Then there were six marines, and the coxswain of the boat.

"Now, men, be as careful as possible, for all depends upon our behavior and coolness," said the naval lieutenant, and taking the arm of his companion, a midshipman, he said, simply:

"Come!"

The sergeant and his marines, armed with muskets, followed the two officers, and in a short while they presented themselves at the huge gateway of the gloomy prison. The guard allowed them to enter, and halting at the quarters of the commandant, the lieutenant handed a card to a servant, begging that it be given to the general.

"The general is absent, *senor*," returned the servant with answer.

"Ask to see *Senorita Revilla*," quickly whispered the midshipman.

The officer immediately asked that the card be returned to the *Senorita Inez*, and he was requested to walk in, the midshipman following.

"You would see my uncle, the commandante?" said Inez Revilla, rising, as the two officers entered the room.

"Yes, lady, but I am told he is not here at present. I returned from the *Sea Hawk*, at the request of Captain Markham, to ask General Sebastian to allow me to take the prisoner, Rafael the Rover, back on board the vessel, to obtain from him some valuable testimony which he alone can give."

Inez Revilla, since the departure of Captain Markham and her lover, had been pacing the floor, vainly endeavoring to hit upon some clever plan for the escape of Rafael. Now she was all attention, at the mention of his name, and, had Bancroft Edmunds been the officer sent for him, she would boldly have asked him to allow the prisoner to get away upon the way back to the vessel, but now, what could she do?

"Perhaps there may be some chance if he goes. I will let the officer communicate with Alfuerie," she thought, and calling to a servant she bade him conduct the officers to the *alide's* quarters, saying:

"I can do nothing, seniors, but perhaps Captain Alfuerie may."

The lieutenant turned to go; but the midshipman stepped close up to Inez, and whispered, quickly:

"Lady, would you see Rafael die? Remember he saved you from worse than death."

"I do remember; and I would save him were it in my power; but how can I?"

"With ease. Give the order for him to return with us to the ship. You are a woman, and you would not have his life on your head when you can save him."

"No, no, no; but who are you?"

"Can I trust you?"

"With your life."

"I am not what I seem; I am a woman—the daughter of one who told Rafael that you were in the power of Luis Ramirez."

"You are Pretty Nellie, then?" eagerly said Inez.

"Yes, lady! Now let him go—please let him go, and even the wicked buccaneers will pray for and bless you!" pleaded Nellie.

"This is a bold, desperate game to play, and you shall not lose if I can aid you. I will act at once. *Garcia!*"

"Well, *Senorita Inez*," and a soldier came in from the hallway.

"Bid Captain Alfuerie come here, and also Lieutenant Redmond, the American officer with him—ah! they are here."

"*Senorita*, in the absence of your uncle I cannot let the prisoner go, even though I would like to, under the circumstances," said Eduard Alfuerie, entering the room, accompanied by the supposed Ross Redmond.

"Then I will take the responsibility, *senor capitan*. I know why the prisoner is wanted. Please have him brought at once from his dungeon, and I will report it to my uncle."

The *alide* bowed and retired, with the look upon his face that the maiden was taking a great deal upon herself; but, he said nothing, and in fifteen minutes more, the supposed Americans passed out of the Moro gateway, with Rafael the Rover between them.

At a glance the chief had recognized Roy Woodbridge, Nellie, and the men; but no sign betrayed recognition, and they reached the boat in safety, and were soon on board the lugger, which at once got under way and headed out of the harbor, Mabel Markham standing on deck as she glided by the *Sea Hawk*, and rejoicing in her heart at the escape of the man she now loved with all the intensity of her passionate nature.

As the lugger disappeared in the gloom, seaward,

Mabel Markham turned and greeted her father and Lieutenant Edmunds, who just then came on board, and as she looked her eyes fell on a dark, cloaked form that was brought up and laid on the deck.

"It is the body of Melville; we will bury it to-morrow with honors," said her father, and with a shudder the maiden descended to the cabin and her state room, just as a fleet-sailing *carera* flew down the harbor, going seaward with all sail set.

CHAPTER XLIII.

MAD MAUD'S STORY.

As soon as he reached the deck of the lugger, Rafael felt himself free, and gave the orders to at once get to sea.

"You, Salvador, with two men, jump into the small-boat and row to the upper end of the harbor after the *carera*. You will find her anchored off the small creek that puts in there."

"Tell Matt Morton to spread all sail, and come at once to the island. Now, Woodbridge, let her head seaward," and Rafael descended into the cabin, followed by Nellie and one of the men who was to knock the irons off from the ankles and wrists of his chief.

"Thank you, Catalina. Now go on deck and ask Mr. Woodbridge to join me here, for we are in deep water now, I know by the movement of the lugger," and Rafael arose and stretched out his limbs, no longer bound by irons.

"Roy, my dear old fellow, I could not delay longer in thanking you for my life—not that thanks repay you—"

"Hold on, captain! don't lay it on me. *She* did it, Midshipman Nellie. Tell him all about it, Nell, and then, to save your blushes, I will tell him that I love an officer on board the *Sea Hawk*, Bancroft Edmunds by name—love him because he killed Paul Melville; but go oh, Nell, and tell the captain," said the delighted lieutenant.

In a few words as possible, Pretty Nellie told Rafael all, and she could not but notice how he was roused when she mentioned Mabel as the originator of the bold plot, and the authority Inez Revilla had taken upon herself.

"Three nobler women never lived than are you three, and, if I do not prove myself worthy of your friendship, may I perish at my first wrong act," said Rafael, impressively.

"That is what I say, captain. Now I will tell you something of this little girl," and Roy Woodbridge made known the secret of Nellie's life, and his love for her.

"Forgive me, Nellie, for once having wronged you in thought. Now, Woodbridge, I intend returning to the island, get my father, if he will go, and sail for the States, where I intend to settle down to an honorable life, for I have some money that I never won under the Red Anchor flag—enough to support me, and you and Nellie, and your mother, too, Nellie, if she will go with us. What say you?"

"The very thing, captain! but I have already told you of my life, and yet I have not told you that I can now return to my home in honor, for I have lately received letters from there."

"I live on the Virginia coast, and you can buy a farm next to my own, or live with us. Say yes."

"I will go with you. We will take the *carera*, and several of our best men to man it. Now let us go on deck and see if we can discover the little craft coming astern, for I should feel very sorry if harm befell Morton, Salvador and the men."

"They will soon be along. Sail ho!" sung out Roy Woodbridge as he reached the deck.

Far astern was visible a sail, and in a short while Rafael pronounced it to be the *carera*, and a cheer burst from the crew of the lugger, who seemed wild with joy at the release of their chief.

Rapidly the swift *carera* overhauled the lugger, and after a quick run the two vessels ran into the island harbor, not a cable's length apart.

As they landed the islanders met them with shouts of delight; but Mad Maud was not among them, nor the old chief.

"Where is my mother?" asked Nellie, faintly.

"She is at the chief's cabin, *senorita*," said a buccaneer.

"And my father?" asked Rafael.

"Up at the cabin," was the answer.

Dreading evil, Rafael and Nellie walked rapidly on and soon reached the quarters of the chief.

The door was open, and just within lay a form upon a cot, while beside it knelt Mad Maud—her face pale and tear-stained.

"You have come too late; he is dead."

"Dead, Maud! My father dead?" cried Rafael, kneeling by the cot.

"Yes; he grieved so for you that he brought on hemorrhage from his wound, and it killed him—your father and my husband."

"Woman, what mean you? This is no time for you to show your madness," said Rafael sternly.

"Rafael Mordaunt, I am not mad. I was mad, oh, yes; but the fire has gone from my brain, and I am sane, and I tell you the truth—that man was my husband and I am your mother."

Rafael gazed upon her in silence: could he believe what he heard?

Since his fourth year he had never seen his mother—he had been told that she was dead—cruelly murdered—could this be she?

"Do you tell the truth?" he gasped, at last, while Nellie, pale and trembling, stood by.

"So help me God, yes! Listen, Rafael, and you shall judge."

"Twenty-five years ago I married the man who lies dead before us. It was far away from here—in a Northern State. He was rich, I was poor, and his riches and good looks won me from one I then loved, and to whom I was engaged."

"We were married, this man, Rafael Mordaunt, and I—and we traveled about the world for several years—in fact, until our two children were born."

"Two children?" almost whispered Rafael.

"Yes, two children—you and your sister, four years your junior; there she stands! Then we crossed the path of your father's cousin, his best friend, the one to whom I had been engaged, and the only man I ever loved."

"That meeting of Rafael Mordaunt and Walter Markham was a bitter one to me. Your father fell, dangerously wounded by the hand of Walter Markham, who shot him down mercilessly, and I, I listen,

for I hide not my own shame, fled with the man who had, I believed then, killed my husband."

"Oh, God!" groaned Rafael.

"I have had that cry on my lips ever since, boy, for never did I know joy again. Yes, we fled, and I took with me my little girl—this one here. You looked too much like your father for me to love you then, and I was infatuated with Walter Markham, then an officer of the United States navy."

"For some years he treated me well, and then I learned that he was engaged to be married to a Southern lady, and, accusing him of it, I swore revenge."

"One night I went to sleep, I and Nellie here, as usual, and when we awoke we were at sea, in the cabin of a vessel, and by my bedside sat a woman and man, who had me in charge."

"They told me I was mad, and was being sent to an insane asylum, in England; but I knew that I had been drugged, and carried, with my child, on board that vessel."

"But I reached not England, for the vessel was taken by a pirate, and in that pirate I recognized my husband, him whom I had believed dead; but he had survived his wound, and had gone in search of Walter Markham, fitting out a vessel for the purpose, and having boarded several vessels was declared an outlaw, and thus he drifted into piracy."

"He knew me as soon as I did him, and he swore he would kill me, but offered me life if I would swear never to tell you, or any one else, that I was his wife, your mother. To save the lives of Nellie and myself, I took the oath, and he brought me to this island to live; but never, until last night, when he was taken ill, did he speak one kind word to me in all these long years gone by; then he forgave me, Rafael—"

"And I forgive you, too, mother."

With a cry of almost frenzied joy, the poor woman sprang toward her son, and was drawn to his heart, while Nellie, his sister, was encircled by his other arm.

Thus stood these three, so strangely united, and the moments sped away.

At last Rafael spoke:

"Mother, I always knew my father had a bitter revenge to reap upon Captain Markham, yet I never knew the whole story, and I believed my mother to be dead. I never knew I had a sister; now we must never part."

"Rafael, my noble son, in your father's papers you will find his miniature and mine; also titles to property he holds. He bade me tell you to seek your own. He gave you his blessing in dying, and I beg you, my son, to give up this fearful life."

"Mother, my resolve is already taken. Within two hours I leave this island forever. Now, you and my sweet, brave sister, prepare to go with me in the *carera*. As soon as I return, I will have my poor father buried," and affectionately embracing both his new-found mother and sister, Rafael hastily wended his way to the beach, where Roy Woodbridge informed him that a few of the islanders would sail in the lugger for other scenes, but the women and children, with the remainder of the men, except several who went in the *carera*, preferred to remain on the island.

"But the *Sea Hawk* and other vessels-of-war will come here."

"Yes, sir, I told them that; but they say they will play innocent—say they have been made captives by the buccaneers, who deserted the island and left them here."

"So be it. We must get away at once—as soon as I have buried my father—nay, I will give him burial in the deep sea, which he loved so well."

Half an hour, after, the *carera* stood out of the island basin for the last time, and at her helm was Rafael, no longer the Rover, while by his side stood his mother and sister, and Roy Woodbridge, Matt Morton and Salvador were acting as the crew of the fleet craft, that was so swiftly leaving astern the buccaneers' isle.

CHAPTER XLIV.

CONCLUSION.

WHEN it was discovered the following morning that Rafael the Rover had escaped, of course no one was to blame, for Captain Markham had not sent for the prisoner, as could be easily proven, and General Sebastian had not been at the Moro when the prisoner left, and he would not allow Inez to be censured for what she had done.

Furious at the escape of Rafael, Captain Markham at once put to sea, visited the buccaneer isle, and sent in his boats; but they found there only what pretended to be a peaceful settlement, the captives of the pirates, who had gone, the islanders said, they knew not where.

Returning to Havana, Captain Markham resigned his commission, and Bancroft Edmunds was promoted to the command of the *Sea Hawk*, and his old commander and his lovely daughter set sail in the brig *Sunbeam*, Captain Rodney, for New York; but they did not leave Havana until they attended a grand wedding, where Inez Revilla was made the *Senora* Edmunds, her husband being the handsome, dashing young captain of the American sloop-of-war.

Whether it was the presence of Walter Markham on board the *Sunbeam*, or not, it is hard to say; but certain it is that storm after storm swept over the brig on her northward voyage, until, one dark and stormy night, she went ashore on the Virginia coast and became a complete wreck, her crew being washed into the sea, and along with them Captain Markham, who thus met his death amid storm and ruin.

But two persons were saved—and those two Captain Rodney and Mabel Markham, who had sought refuge in the cabin as the waves swept the decks.

And these two were saved by the crew of a life-boat that came out to the wreck in the early morning—and in that boat were two persons well known to the reader—Roy Woodbridge and Rafael Mordaunt.

Kind reader, who has sailed with me o'er so many leagues of sea, and gone with me through so many scenes of danger, need I tell you now that Pretty Nellie became the wife of Roy Woodbridge, and Mabel Markham married the man whose life she had saved, and who was once known as Rafael the Rover?

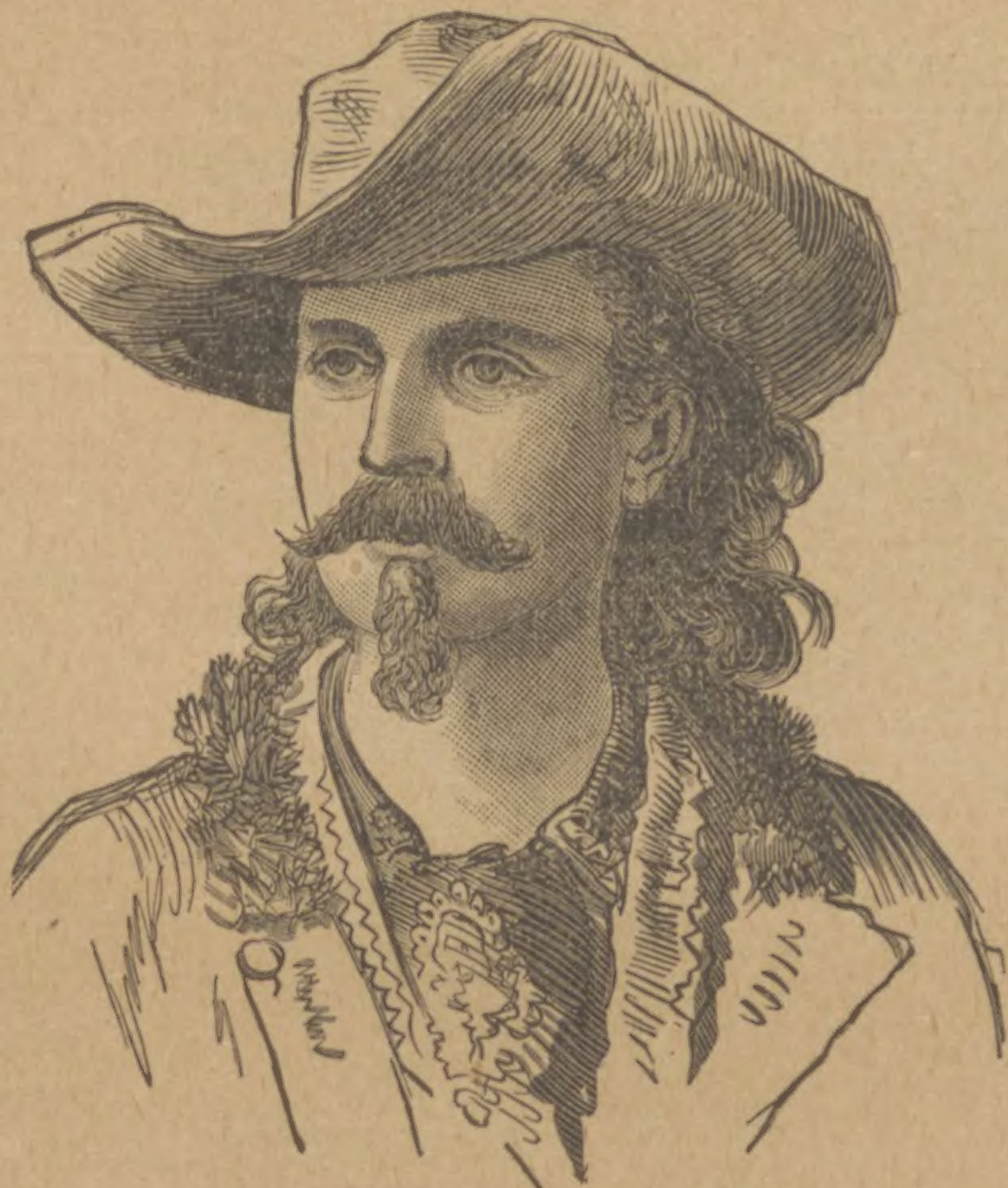
No, you have already surmised this ending, and I will say *adieu!*

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